

The New REPUBLIC

THE UNNECESSARY FALL OF BARACK OBAMA

A Counter-history / John B. Judis

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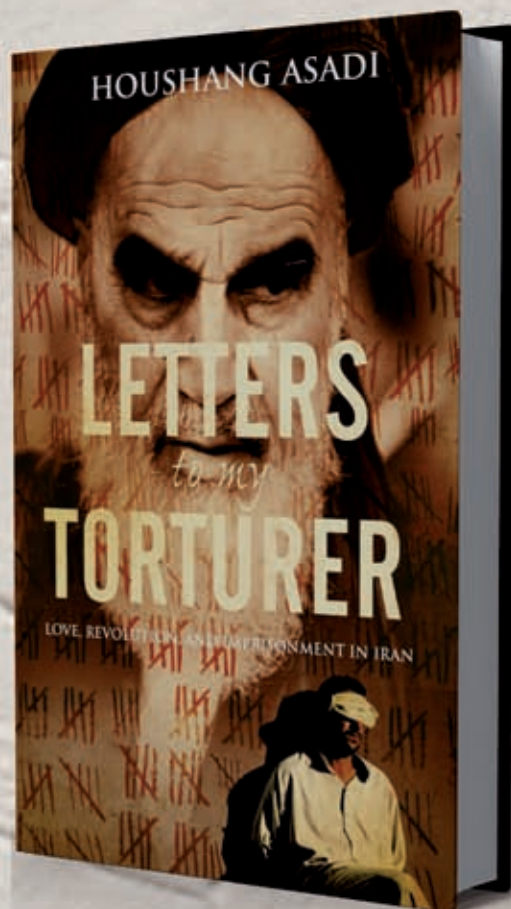
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Democracy Corpse

MANY SOUTH AMERICAN politicians have laid claim to the spirit of Simón Bolívar, but very few have actually communed with it. At meetings, Hugo Chávez is said to leave an empty chair for the continent's nineteenth-century liberator. When Chávez ordered the exhumation of Bolívar's corpse from its grave in the National Pantheon last month, he took to Twitter and exclaimed, "Rise up, Simón, as it's not time to die."

This latest escapade returns us to the eternal question: Is Hugo Chávez just a buffoon or something more dangerous? Certainly, the evidence for his buffoonery is strong. Like the time he said he claimed to smell sulfur from the devil himself on the dais of the United Nations because of George W. Bush's presence. Or the ample moments of comic monomania in his caffeine-fueled monologues on his weekly TV chat show, "Aló Presidente," where he fills airtime by reading poetry, phoning Fidel Castro, and describing plots to assassinate him. Of course, nothing screams crank more than his removal of Bolívar's skeleton—in the name of an eccentric theory (based on a letter deciphered with Masonic code) that the great general was actually murdered, perhaps by a conspiracy that included President Andrew Jackson and the king of Spain. (The implication: They will come for the latter-day Bolívar next.)

It would all be good kitschy fun if it weren't for the toll Chávez has exacted on his country. His dismantling of Venezuelan democracy has been painstaking and thorough. During the past few months, without much protest from the outside world, he has neutered the last remaining checks on his power.

Not so long ago, Venezuela had a raucous media culture. No longer. In June, Chávez created the Centro de Estudio Situacional de la Nación—we would translate, but it's Orwellian gobble-dyook in any language. The center is, in the words of Human Rights Watch, a "censorship office" with broad powers to suppress information. Chávez hardly needed to escalate his war against the press. Earlier this summer, the government issued an arrest warrant for Guillermo Zuloaga, the principal owner of Globovisión, the country's last remaining major TV station with sympathy for the opposition. As Francisco Toro has written at TNR Online, Chávez has created an atmosphere of self-censorship. In the wake of the government's shuttering of 32

opposition-minded radio stations and two local TV stations last August, every remaining network fears having the plug pulled. As a result, broadcast media don't cover stories that might reflect badly on the regime—like the 75,000 tons of food that a state-owned conglomerate allegedly now has rotting in storage.

There are several opposition politicians who are also rotting in state facilities. Chávez recently arrested a former governor named Oswaldo Álvarez Paz, who had the temerity to discuss Venezuelan military ties with the FARC, the narco-guerrillas that torment Colombia. (Actually, he was just echoing the findings of a Spanish judge who had investigated the matter.) In April, Chávez also arrested his former defense minister, Raúl Isaías Baduel, who had campaigned against a constitutional referendum that proposed removing presidential term limits. Since many opposition leaders come from the ranks of state and local government, Chávez is working to gut

those institutions. He plans on subsuming them with a system of "communes."

Over the past decade, U.S. policy has been to ignore Chávez. The theory holds that he can only thrive if we willingly play the role of his foil. Our prime worry was that he might succeed in exporting his revolution to the rest of the continent. But Chávez's regional power is declining. Falling energy prices—and 31 percent inflation at home—have starved him of the funds that he once used to buy support abroad. Furthermore, the political mood on the continent has swung away from the Chavistas. Right-wing parties have won the last two big elections in the neighborhood, in Chile and Colombia. There's little risk, therefore, in taking a harder line against the dictator.

The Obama administration's criticisms of Chávez's final descent into authoritarianism have, for the most part, been perfunctory and not terribly loud. This is a shame. Chávez had initially lavished praise on Obama, which would have made the U.S. president's criticisms doubly damning. Fortunately, there's one small sign that the administration is willing to engage in rougher tactics. Obama's new choice for ambassador to Venezuela, a Foreign Service officer named Larry Palmer, has begun playing sly rhetorical games. He has described morale in the Venezuelan army as low and been blunt about its ties to the FARC. These remarks have enraged Chávez, who says he will refuse to accept Palmer's diplomatic credentials. This is exactly what we should be doing more of. Venezuela's media have been silenced; its opposition is cowed and broken. By shining a light on Chávez's authoritarianism, by forcing him into a defensive crouch, we can help preserve a sliver of hope for Venezuelan democracy. ♦



Mister Ed

Obama's second most important reform.

JONATHAN CHAIT

LIBERAL ANGER with the Obama administration generally takes the form of disappointment that his agenda hasn't gone far enough. The exception is the teachers' unions and their allies, who are furious precisely because Obama has gone *too far*. The president of the National Education Association laments "the most anti-educator, anti-union, anti-student environment" he has ever seen. Two weeks ago, a consortium of civil rights groups, including the NAACP and the Rainbow PUSH Coalition, labeled Obama's education agenda discriminatory, arguing that "communities of color have been testing grounds for unproven methods of educational change." An editorial in *The Nation* attacked Obama's "disturbing continuity" with the Bush administration. Diane Ravitch, a recent and fervent convert to the cause, has undertaken a revival-like speaking tour before teacher-dominated audiences, accusing Obama of "promot[ing] privatization" and "dismantling the teaching profession."

The terms of the debate seem calculated to make liberal knees jerk. On one side: civil rights groups, traditional government programs, and teachers. (*Yay!*) On the other side: the market, competition, and even George W. Bush. (*Booo!*) What reasons could progressives possibly have to side with all those nasty things against that which they hold so dear? Actually, there are plenty.

Obama has called education reform "the single most important thing we've done." That may not be true—the health care overhaul is—but education reform actually has a lot in common with health care reform. In both cases, the country is saddled with a system shaped by the interests of providers, with little effort to match inputs with outputs. By international standards, the American system is increasingly expensive and decreasingly effective. And, for a significant minority of the population, the results are utterly disastrous.

Much like in health care, the education landscape features small pockets of innovation in a sea of inertia. And, as with health care reform, Obama's education goal is to rationalize the system by correcting the incentive structure. The

TRB *From Washington*

biggest step in this direction is a \$4 billion pot of federal grants, called Race to the Top, being doled out to states that overhaul their education systems.

The most bitter fights about Obama's agenda center around evaluating and compensating teachers. Copious research has shown that teacher effectiveness has the single most dramatic impact upon student performance. The best teachers advance their students one and a half grade levels in a year. The worst teachers advance their students half a grade level.

The trouble is, most schools have no way to reward good teachers or weed out bad ones. Most union contracts require schools to pay teachers based on seniority. Want to fire a terrible teacher? Good luck—the best that most principals can hope for is to ship their worst ones off to some other school. Thus the need for measures to evaluate teachers. And so, Race to the Top has pushed states to improve assessments of teacher performance, via a mix of objective standards, such as improvement in student scores, and subjective ones, such as classroom observation.

The traditional liberal slogan demands that we "treat teachers like professionals." (You hear this ringing from the podium at every Democratic National Convention, where teachers make up about 10 percent of the delegates.) Professionals have the opportunity to earn more money if they excel and run the risk of being demoted or fired if they fail. This, ironically, turns out to be the exact opposite of what many teachers' unions want.

Just how sacrosanct do teachers consider their tenure protection? In 2008, Michelle Rhee, chancellor of the D.C. public schools, offered teachers a \$10,000 bonus and a 20 percent across-the-board pay raise, plus—only for those who accepted it—performance pay and an even larger pay raise that would bring the chance to earn up to \$131,000 per year. In return, the local union had

to accept easier provisions for firing the least effective teachers. The offer sparked bitter protests.

Education traditionalists offer a flurry of objections to Obama's agenda. First, they insist that compensation reform devalues teacher experience. "If you go in for surgery," writes Ravitch, "do you want an experienced surgeon, or a resident?" In fact, the evidence shows that teacher experience only helps up to the third year.

Second, traditionalists insist that test scores fail to properly measure teacher performance. Yet nobody claims that test scores are perfect. (Nor have reforms made test scores the sole gauge of teachers' success.) But some teachers do produce higher levels of improvement than others. Anyway, very few professions have a perfect method for measuring effectiveness. Rewarding teachers on the basis of imperfect evaluations—the way most professionals get treated—beats evaluating them based on a measure (seniority) that bears no relation to effectiveness.

Third, traditionalists lambaste Obama for lavishing money on "unproven" methods, to quote the favorite epithet of Ravitch and recalcitrant unions. Or, sometimes, they go further, insisting that you can't improve educational outcomes among poor kids unless you resolve poverty itself. (*The Nation* editorializes that education reform can only work if it "address[es] the roots of failure in the most depressed areas.")

It is true that the school-reform movement has produced a wide array of outcomes. Some models have failed, while others have yielded staggeringly impressive results. In several cities, KIPP schools—which serve inner-city neighborhoods and accept students by lottery—have *completely closed* the achievement gap with affluent suburban schools. Race to the Top has both given states the incentive to allow experimentation and helped scale up experiments, like KIPP, that have proven successful. To decry Obama for funding "unproven" methods misses the point completely. Innovation, *by definition*, requires experimenting with unproven methods.

Education and health care are two key sectors of the economy that have failed to increase their productivity. They are also two cases where resources have been allocated without regard to outcome. Few liberals opposed the administration's aggressive campaign to impose rigorous measurements and accountability upon the sclerotic medical system. They should welcome the same reformist impulse in education. ♦



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The Mall

Texastential Crisis

Governor Wingnut in peril.

RICK PERRY *should* be riding high. Chasing his third full term as governor of Texas, Perry is a blood-red conservative running in a blood-red state in a blood-red cycle. In April of last year, he cheered a bill in the statehouse aimed at reasserting Texas's sovereign rights against an "oppressive" federal government. A few days later, he began publicly musing about how, in its struggle against tyranny, Texas might find it necessary to secede. And who could forget that fateful February morning when the governor took down a coyote (in one shot!) with the laser-sighted Ruger .380 he carries on his morning jogs (loaded with hollow-points, naturally). The man clearly knows his audience: The Lone Star electorate is so pro-GOP that a Democrat has not won statewide office in 16 years and so anti-Obama that it's home to seven of the 13 House sponsors of the "birther bill." A February report by the Democratic firm Public Policy Polling noted that the president's approval rating in Texas had dropped to an "eye-popping" 19 percent, prompting *The Houston Chronicle* to observe that, among the state's independent voters, "he's fallen off the cliff." If the political winds at Perry's back were any stronger, they'd blow him face-first off the Congress Avenue Bridge into Lady Bird Lake.

So how is it that Governor Wingnut now finds himself in a real race against a Harvard-educated ex-Clinton appointee with about as much charisma and machismo as, well, a Harvard-educated ex-Clinton appointee? A two-term mayor of Houston and onetime chairman of the Texas Democratic Party, challenger Bill White is described in terms

like "low-key," "reasoned," "deliberate," and "thoughtful"—qualities that would seem to make him a poor fit for office in this political age of fear and loathing and rage. Yet White is holding his own against the hootin', hollerin' Perry in both polling (a June Public Policy Polling survey had them tied at 43 percent, and even the Republican-friendly Rasmussen gives Perry only a "slight," single-digit lead) and money-grubbing (White has a cash-on-hand edge of \$9 million to Perry's \$5.9 million). In March, politi-

competence. Despite his Democratic pedigree, he is regarded as neither terribly partisan (big city mayoralties in Texas are nonpartisan) nor terribly liberal. He has experience raising money and has plenty of rich friends—a big plus in a state with no limits on individual campaign contributions. He also seems to be benefiting from the fact that, as Democratic consultant Dan McClung puts it, his party's activists "haven't had anything at all to look forward to in years." White's early promise, observes McClung, has them "all maxed out in vigor and vim."

But this race isn't really about White or the enthusiasms of Democrats; it's about Rick Perry. For a while, White tried running as an education candidate, says James Henson, a pollster with the University of Texas. "It didn't really get him anywhere. Only with direct attacks on Perry has he gotten a little traction." Of course, in Texas, it's tough to generate widespread outrage over even Perry's most conservative positions, like his denial of global warming, his rejection of federal education funds, or his nomination of a young-Earth creationist to chair the State Board of Education. In addition to the state's conservatism, there is

a strong strain of Texas exceptionalism, meaning that criticism of how things are run can backfire if voters think you're dissing their beloved homeland. "It's like a bunch of drunken German soccer fans," jokes a non-native Republican operative who has done work in the state.

So what's a battle-minded opposition to do? Rather than focus on Perry's positions, Team White has been attacking the governor as an arrogant, out-of-touch incumbent grown soft and lazy during his ten-year reign. Using state schedules, Dems estimated that Perry spends only seven hours a week on state business—a figure they have been touting loudly.



Rick Perry carries a loaded Ruger .380 on morning jogs.

cal handicapper Charlie Cook moved the race from "leans Republican" to "toss up," positing that Perry faced "the most difficult race of his career."

Now, Texas being Texas, it's tough to find a political realist in the state who thinks White will actually win this thing. But pretty much everyone (who doesn't work for Perry) acknowledges that the former mayor is giving the governor an unusually good run for his money, which begs the question: What in the heck is happening?

First, let's look at what White has going for him: He was a popular mayor of Houston, earning a reputation for managerial

They've also been fanning the storyline of how Perry, having moved out of the governor's mansion in 2007 to allow for restoration work, has since been living in an upscale, gated community in suburban Austin at a cost to taxpayers of \$10,000 per month. And the Travis County District Attorney's office has taken an interest in Dems' allegations that Republicans, including Perry's people, paid an out-of-state firm (with illegal corporate donations, no less) to help put a Green Party candidate on the ballot in an effort to drain liberal votes from White. "There has been a series of stories emphasizing that Perry has a lot of connections in the political community and that he's willing to win at any cost," says Henson.

This raises the intriguing possibility that, even in Texas, voters' toss-the-bums-out grumpiness goes beyond despising Democrats to distrusting anyone in power. "Perry does have a problem being a ten-year incumbent," says Evan Smith, the longtime *Texas Monthly* editor now heading up *The Texas Tribune*. "There's not a whole lot of undecided opinion out there. Even some Republicans will say he's been in office too long or his conservatism is too much, even for Texas. And that's an opening for White." McClung asserts, "Perry is his own worst problem because he's been there for so long." And it's not as if the governor is a low-key, low-profile kind of guy, he adds. "It's a big state, it's got a lot of TV stations, and he is on constantly."

Of course, most political watchers note that few voters are tuned in at this stage. ("It's a hundred degrees and nobody's paying attention," says Republican consultant Reggie Bashur.) Worse still for White, Perry has a history of floundering, then morphing into Super-candidate as Election Day approaches. "He has a really well-run, tough, aggressive, well-funded" team, says McClung. Complicating matters, notes Henson, Texans who identify as "independents" or "don't knows" in campaign polls break disproportionately for Republicans on Election Day.

With all this in mind, it's unsurprising to hear the governor's people pooh-poohing White. "Who says he has a race?" challenges Perry pollster Mike Baselice. Baselice concedes that White's chances are greater than zero, but that's as far as he's willing to go. Running through the numbers—from party affiliation to voter enthusiasm—Baselice predicts another GOP sweep of statewide races. "It's nothing more than mathematics," he insists.

Indeed, this basic equation seems likely to hold. Still, as November approaches, White's performance may provide insight into the precise nature of the electorate's discontent. If an uncharismatic, Ivy League Clintonite can get within spitting distance of Governor Wingnut in this unfriendliest of climes, the political winds may be more complicated than they seem.

MICHELLE COTTLE

Peter Hitchens of the *Mail on Sunday* (yes, younger brother of Christopher) and Simon Heffer in *The Daily Telegraph* are witheringly hostile: "Because Mr Cameron believes in nothing except remaining Prime Minister," began one characteristic Heffer sentence the other day. Spiteful or partisan critics can be shrugged off, and the animosity of the crankier left and right might actually help Cameron. But even those who are more kindly disposed toward him sometimes wonder what, if anything, lurks behind his surface charm.

CAMERON BECAME Tory leader not quite by accident, but certainly by a fortunate turn of events. After the Conservative Party suffered its third straight electoral defeat, in May 2005, the leader, Michael Howard, announced that he would resign in December—a skillful maneuver intended to give Cameron the best shot at winning the leadership race. So he did, sealing victory with an eloquent speech at the party conference, à la Obama.

Some Labour MPs foolishly tried to deride Cameron as a gilded Old Etonian son of privilege, pointing to his aristocratic family background and his undergraduate days in the notorious Bullingdon Club, a kind of Oxonian Skull and Bones in fancy dress. Damning a man for his parents is a cheap shot, and some might even forgive Cameron for behaving like a pretentious dissipated asshole at Oxford (so did many of us, come to think of it).

The more serious charge is his adult career. Cameron had a brief interlude as a political aide to Norman Lamont, the chancellor of the exchequer under the government of John Major. But Cameron's first taste of politics ended most unhappily with "Black Wednesday" in September 1992. Lamont had to announce that the sterling had been forced out of the European exchange system by market pressure (i.e., George Soros). In the photographs from that day, young Dave can be seen lurking behind Lamont.

Cameron moved on to spend several lucrative years as head of p.r. at Carlton, a second-rate media company. This was hardly training for a statesman, and he acquired a reputation for less-than-absolute veracity. Jeff Randall, the former business correspondent for the BBC, once said that he wouldn't trust Cameron with his daughter's pocket money.

As leader of the opposition, Cameron was the first Tory in years who could lay a glove on Tony Blair, and he went on to outplay Brown comprehensively. But those years also saw a bewildering series

Tory Story

Is David Cameron too glib?

ON FRIDAY, May 7, for the first time since 1974, we woke up the morning after the British election and didn't know who our prime minister would be. No party had won an absolute majority, and so, for a period that a BBC-TV documentary has dubbed the *Five Days that Changed Britain*, Nick Clegg, leader of the Liberal Democrats, held the balance of power and negotiated with Gordon Brown, who was still entrenched as prime minister, and the Conservative leader, David Cameron. Finally, the Tories cut a deal with Clegg. As Brown lugubriously announced his resignation, Dave told his wife Sam to "get her frock on," and they sped to Buckingham Palace, where Cameron became prime minister of the first coalition government of my lifetime.

Since then, this new Tory-Lib Dem government has leapt ferociously into

action, slashing public spending and introducing a frenzied series of reforms, while Cameron has impressed audiences at home and abroad. Cameron and Clegg also appear to be very much at ease with one another. Here are two pleasant-looking men of exactly the same age and much the same education. There's some dispute as to who first coined the phrase "the Brokeback coalition," but those who have seen that "ludicrous tear-jerker" (as one of our more sarcastic critics called it), and who also saw Dave and Nick arrive at the *Spectator* summer party a few weeks ago damn near holding hands, must admit that it's quite a good joke.

And yet: A faint aura of suspicion still lingers about Cameron, who became prime minister without sealing the deal with the electorate, in that annoying but apt phrase. He has, of course, his share of fervent detractors: Labour is naturally bitter, as are malcontents on both the Lib Dem left and the Tory right—and the latter have loud voices in the press.

of policy reversals. One moment Cameron talked about “hugging a hoodie”—newspaper shorthand for his comment that the public should have empathy for juvenile criminals—the next, he wanted to get tough on crime by building more prisons. There was also his mystifying volte-face over whether or not tax policy should be used to encourage the traditional family. In the most risible episode of all, Cameron attempted to parade his environmental authenticity by cycling from his home to Parliament. The effect was quite spoiled when the TV cameras picked up a car trailing behind him with his clean shirts. (To Cameron’s credit, he has at least turned this into a joke against himself.)

To accuse Cameron of shiftiness might seem perverse when, as prime minister, he has appeared to talk tough on so many fronts. He has criticized Israel over Gaza and Pakistan over its intelligence service’s ties with the Taliban. He has informed his compatriots that the age of automatic retirement may be raised and that no one should expect subsidized council homes for life.

And yet, his attempts at straight talk don’t always ring true. They have, at times, been marred by an ingratiating desire to please whichever audience Cameron happens to be addressing. Before the Conservative Friends of Israel, of which Cameron is a member, he has professed his undying love for the Jewish state. Then, in Ankara, he described Gaza as a “prison camp.” On a visit to Bangalore, Cameron noted sternly that Pakistan cannot “look both ways” on terrorism. Shortly afterward, while entertaining Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari at Chequers, the prime minister’s country residence, Cameron spoke warmly about the “unbreakable relationship between Britain and Pakistan based on our mutual interests.” Zardari is surely a man with nothing to learn about facing two ways, but, given Cameron’s record, he might have asked the Urdu equivalent of “tu quoque?”

In August, Cameron had to apologize to an elderly lady for “denigrating his own country” by saying that “we were the junior partner in 1940.” He had uttered those absurd words in an interview with ABC News while visiting the United States, again seeking to flatter his audience but forgetting (unlike his older compatriots) that, in 1940, the United States was neither a junior nor senior partner in the war against Hitler; rather, it was conspicuously neutral.

I write this with mixed feelings. Our country is in a mess, Cameron is smart

and energetic, and any successful democratic politician has to reach out to different constituencies. All the same, if there’s one thing the British people have been yearning for, it is political honesty. The country longs to be cleansed of the stain left by the last government, which could never tell the truth about anything, from the economy to the Iraq war. Nor will anyone ever feel quite the same about our Parliament after the huge scandal of members’ fraudulent and extravagant expense claims erupted last year and led this May to the largest turnover of MPs since 1945.

Years ago, just after he had been caught

out in some sordid skullduggery, Blair told us that he was “a pretty straight sort of guy.” He spent the rest of his premiership confuting those words. What Cameron needs to do is not to strike seemingly brave postures, but to act honestly. Otherwise—well, as the openly gay Labour MP Ben Bradshaw teasingly reminded the prime minister just before the parliamentary recess, *Brokeback Mountain* does not end happily.

Geoffrey Wheatcroft

Geoffrey Wheatcroft’s books include *THE STRANGE DEATH OF TORY ENGLAND* and *YO, BLAIR!*

The Nowhere Bomb

Should Israel come out of the nuclear closet?

SHOULD JERUSALEM bring its bomb out of the basement? Israel, for at least the moment, is the sole possessor of atomic weapons in the Middle East, with an arsenal that now includes approximately 200 warheads. But it is also the only nuclear-armed nation to hide its cache behind a façade of official silence—neither confirming nor denying its existence.

Iran’s mounting nuclear capability arguably demands a reconsideration of this stance. Explicitly announcing its nuclear status would have its advantages. It would upgrade Israel’s deterrent. It would send a clear message to the mulahs and their allies.

But disclosure poses its own challenges. The nuclear pariah spotlight now shines on Iran. Were Israel to declare itself a nuclear power, that attention would instantly shift to Jerusalem, given global political biases. It could legitimate Iranian nuclear weapons in the court of international opinion. What’s more, Israel’s declaration could ignite (or excuse) Arab pursuit of nuclear weapons, bringing yet more peril to an already unstable region.

Still, there’s a clear need for Israel to better leverage its arsenal. This tricky task requires that it complicate the mulahs’ risk calculations, without exciting the Arab street. It calls for a new policy, where the country finds subtle ways to draw attention to its nukes without explicitly abandoning its current posture. Call this approach Opacity Plus. It may represent Israel’s best hope for foiling Iran.

Having won its War of Independence in 1948, Israel looked out at a daunting strategic landscape. Surrounded by adver-

saries with growing military capabilities, Israel had only a modest military force of its own. It had also failed in its efforts to enter into a military alliance with either Europe or the United States. And, with lingering fears that the Holocaust might repeat, David Ben-Gurion latched onto the notion that nuclear weapons would provide the ultimate security blanket.

Without resources to move forward on its own, the Jewish state aggressively cultivated France, which had fired up its first research reactor in 1948 and, soon after, invited scientists from Israel’s Weizmann Institute to collaborate on nuclear research. By 1953, Israel and France entered into a formal agreement on nuclear cooperation. Following the Suez crisis, that relationship grew even closer. With Paris’s help, around 1963, Israel opened its own reactor in Dimona, a remote corner of the Negev desert.

Washington wasn’t pleased. It was obsessed with curtailing the spread of the bomb. And, by the end of the Eisenhower administration, it began raising questions about the Dimona facility. Those questions fell to President Kennedy, who would make the lone serious effort to halt the Israeli program. Unconvinced by Ben-Gurion’s repeated assertions that Dimona served civilian purposes, the president demanded the Israelis halt their efforts, even threatening to re-evaluate the whole relationship. Because of Lee Harvey Oswald, that confrontation never happened.

While Lyndon Johnson attempted to leverage American military exports to coax Israel into signing a nuclear nonproliferation treaty, he ultimately let the issue slide. Golda Meir and Richard Nixon finally arrived at an informal understanding in a 1969 meeting in Washington. The American president agreed not to impede Israel’s weapons ambitions, so long as the



Israel should spread rumors that hint at its willingness to use the bomb.

program remained opaque—meaning, no testing of weapons and no public announcement of them.

So began the enshrinement of Israel's policy of nuclear ambiguity, endorsed by all subsequent American presidents, Barack Obama included. In the years that followed the Nixon-Meir agreement, Israeli leaders repeatedly declared the country "would not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into the region." To enforce this pretense, the government avoided all public discussion, even in the Knesset. Censorship laws also prohibited wider talk of these weapons.

Keeping the bomb in the basement had its advantages. Despite regional suspicions and concerns—Gamal Abdel Nasser mulled a preemptive attack—Jerusalem's determination not to flaunt its capability by testing its weapons dampened Arab demands for a response in kind. The result: Egypt never allocated resources for a serious nuclear effort. Neither did Syria, until 2001, when it began building a secret reactor.

Over the years, Israel's program generated a certain mystique. Despite an oc-

casional gaffe—in a 2006 German TV interview, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert let it slip that Israel had nuclear weapons, "as France, America, Russia" do—the only serious breach took place in 1986, when the Israeli nuclear technician Mordechai Vanunu provided the *Sunday Times* of London with photos and documentation of the hidden Dimona infrastructure.

The media splash dissipated in time, but questions lingered: Does the arsenal include thermonuclear devices? Tactical nuclear weapons? What is the operational status? Absent explosive testing, how reliable can the weapons be? What would the weapons target? What would be the risks of radioactive fallout for Israel? Above all: What would prompt Israel to use its arsenal?

SINCE INDEPENDENCE, the country has fought two wars of survival, in 1967 and 1973. Both offered opportunities for nuclear flexing, at least to intimidate its enemies. Still, the arsenal remained under wraps. In the Six Day War, Israel had a small number of unassembled weapons without a clear mission. Its swift victory meant that it never had to implement a plan to conduct a demonstration test in the desert. Six years later, when a far more perilous war broke out, Israel evidently still did not have a practical strategy to use or threaten to use the arsenal. This pattern of behavior replicates that of other nuclear countries. American, Soviet, and Pakistani forces all have reportedly increased their nuclear alert status in crisis or war, but they never cocked their weapons to a timer.

Over the years, Israel has never felt compelled to change its opaque course. It

found other ways to address the nuclear ambitions of its emerging rivals. As suspicions about Iraq's nuclear intentions grew in the late '70s, and Paris refused to halt its nuclear export to Baghdad, Jerusalem sabotaged Saddam's reactor core prior to its shipping; bombed the headquarters and apartment of the director of the Italian manufacturer of the plutonium separation plant Saddam had ordered; and assassinated an Egyptian-born scientist assisting Iraq, and, some speculate, two Iraqi engineers, one in the French capital and the other in Geneva. In June 1981, it used aerial sorties to destroy the Osirak reactor. And, in September 2007, Israel didn't bother with any of the preliminary steps it deployed against Iraq: It simply bombed Syria's clandestine nuclear plant.

Iran presents a more complex challenge. Where Iraq and Syria provided visible, vulnerable, and solitary nuclear targets, Iran has heavily bunkered and geographically dispersed its key sites. There remains concern that even a successful strike will only temporarily set back the program, especially if Tehran were to follow in Iraq's footsteps. Within a decade of the Osirak bombing, Baghdad reconstituted its weapons effort. Only the serendipity of the first Gulf war brought international inspectors into the country with authority to halt a program that was within a year or two of producing nuclear weapons material. History shows that there are only two ways to stop a country bent on nukes. You can defeat a nuclear aspirant in war—as the 1991 conflict and World War II illustrate—or you can coax it into voluntarily relinquishing its ambitions—what happened with the programs in South Africa, Ukraine, Belarus, and Libya.

Israel finds itself at a nuclear fork in the road, should international efforts to halt the mullahs fail. Iran has little reason to believe Israel will lift its historic nuclear self-restraint in crisis or war. This will encourage the mullahs to believe that they can game their arsenal for coercive advantage. Unless Israel disabuses Iran of that presumption, it will lose the benefits of nuclear deterrence. Bringing the bomb out of the basement would appear to be a logical solution to this problem. But the Middle East presents a more complicated strategic tapestry. A nuclear revelation might encourage the likes of Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Syria (again), and others to reconsider nonproliferation vows. It would allow Tehran to rally the region, claiming to be the atomic protector of Muslim interests.

Department of Corrections

"Why Brandeis Matters" (July 22) stated that Robert Rubin was treasury secretary, but in secret negotiations to head Citigroup, when he brokered the deal to pass the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act of 1999. Rubin was the former treasury secretary at the time. He was in negotiations to become co-chairman of Citigroup. In addition, Brandeis died in 1941, not 1940, as was stated. We regret the errors.

BUT THERE'S an alternative, what I call Opacity Plus. Israel would implicitly break its nuclear silence through calculated acts that would shake the mullahs' nuclear calculations. It needs to remind the world of its arsenal and hint at its willingness to use it, through disinformation and rumors conveyed to global reporting outlets and respected commentators. Israel should lift the censorship that blocks much domestic discussion of the bomb to allow a cacophony of debate among the country's chattering classes, to generate "crazy" as well as tempered ideas that would sow doubt about Israel's intentions in the mullahs' minds.

This campaign must include acts as well as talk: military exercises that raise the specter of nuclear use, public acquisition of stealth delivery systems, and test launches. There's some evidence that such plans are already in motion. On May 30, the *Sunday Times* reported that Israel was rotating nuclear-armed submarines off the coast of Iran. But such actions should simply be the tip of a carefully crafted campaign to persuasively build Israel's nuclear deterrence message: "We have what it takes to destroy you."

Opacity Plus may not appear to be a dramatic change in policy. However, absent some show of nuclear ankle, Israel will squander its nuclear leverage. For a country that has refused to officially say anything about its nuclear capability—reflecting not simply a strategic decision but implied discomfort with the bomb—it would enhance its defensive capacity.

This strategy would bring other benefits. It would bolster U.S. efforts to build a more durable and credible deterrent against Iran. And it beats the alternative: an explicit announcement of Israel's arsenal, which would upset Washington's nonproliferation efforts. Opacity Plus—alongside the security umbrella being built by Washington across the region and the not-insignificant sanctions now in place—represents a multilayered strategy that could checkmate Iran's nuclear gambit. The mullahs may act dismissive. They may argue that Israel is a paper tiger and the United States a worn superpower. But bluster cannot compensate for new risks.

BENNETT RAMBERG

Bennett Ramberg served as a policy analyst in the George H.W. Bush administration's Department of State and is the author of NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS AS WEAPONS FOR THE ENEMY: AN UNRECOGNIZED MILITARY PERIL.



What will be the fate of all this kitschy Stalinaia?

Statue of Limitations

A Russian-Georgian war—over Stalin.

DURING THE BRIEF war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008, one of the earliest targets was Gori, a nondescript industrial town near the border of South Ossetia, one of the two separatist provinces over which the conflict was fought. Russian jets bombed the city, hitting apartment buildings and a school. A missile thudded onto the grounds of the city's hospital; cluster bombs exploded in the square. According to the Georgian government, at least 60 people died.

It was curious, therefore, that two local landmarks escaped the bombardment entirely. Gori's singular claim to fame is that it is the birthplace of one Iosef Dzhughashvili, better known as Joseph Stalin. During the height of the Russian attack, both J. Stalin's State Museum and a 20-foot-high bronze statue of the Soviet leader, which gazed impassively over Gori's central square, were left unscathed. To the town's residents, this was evidence of Russia's abiding reverence for the former Soviet dictator.

Although the war ended more than two years ago, resentments between Russia and Georgia still run high. And, while Georgia lacks the military strength to regain its lost territories, it has other means of pushing back against its powerful northern neighbor, many of them related to Stalin.

In May, I visited the Stalin museum on a trip sponsored by the Georgian government. The museum's website describes

Stalin as an "outstanding person." Inside the colonnaded marble building, which was built in 1957, is a shrine to one of the twentieth century's most prolific murderers. Mawkishly heroic portraits in the socialist realist style line the high walls. One shows Stalin standing with an arm placed awkwardly around the shoulder of his smiling daughter, Svetlana, who defected to the United States in 1967—a fact the museum neglects to note. The sparse, tiny cottage where Stalin grew up has been relocated to the grounds, as has the green, armor-plated personal train carriage, in which Stalin, who had a fear of flying, rode to the Potsdam, Tehran, and Yalta conferences. An eerie, darkly lit chamber contains his death mask, while the lobby gift shop offers an array of kitschy Stalinaia: paperweights, mugs, and ash trays. My tour guide, a young woman with jet-black hair, led me unenthusiastically from one painting to the next, reciting rote phrases about the great leader's accomplishments. There is no reference in the entire museum to the more than 20 million people who died under Stalin's rule, and so I asked her about the Great Purge of 1937–1938, when hundreds of thousands of peasants, officials, intellectuals, artists, and other "counter-revolutionaries" were executed or dispatched to the gulags. "There were a lot of people killed and shot," she ventured.

The museum, however, is about to get a radical makeover. According to Culture Minister Nikoloz Rurua, whose department pays for its upkeep, the renovated version will no longer glorify Stalin but will instead be "a museum about a

YANO SHLAMOVI/AEPGETTY IMAGES

museum.” He explained, “We are preserving the propaganda part of the original museum, but we are bringing in some of the real information about Stalinism and the Bolshevik regime.”

DURING HIS LIFETIME, Stalin was never really clear as to how he felt about the country of his birth. In public, he styled himself as a Russian leader, dismissing Georgia as “that small area of Russia.” Yet, in private, he “talked Georgian, ate Georgian, sang Georgian, [and] personally ruled Georgia through the local bosses,” writes Simon Sebag Montefiore, the author of two acclaimed biographies about the Soviet leader, in *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*. His homeland did not benefit from his interest. As a young Bolshevik leader in Moscow, Stalin engineered the Red Army’s 1921 invasion of Georgia, which led to a brutal 70-year occupation. “[The Bolsheviks] exterminated the crème de la crème of this country,” says Alexander Rondeli, head of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies. According to Montefiore, Georgia suffered more from the purges on a per capita basis than any other Soviet republic.

Yet, by the time Stalin died in 1953, he had become an improbable emblem

of Georgian pride. For all his crimes, he was by far the most important person to emerge from this tiny country in the Caucasus mountain range. In 1956, Nikita Khrushchev gave his “secret speech” denouncing Stalin’s “cult of personality” and launching the era of de-Stalinization. Georgians took it personally. Two weeks later, thousands gathered in Tbilisi to commemorate the third anniversary of Stalin’s death. Soviet troops fired on the demonstrators, killing dozens and wounding hundreds. Ronald Suny, a historian of the Caucasus at the University of Michigan, has written that the demonstrations were “the first open expression of Georgian nationalism in forty years.” Georgians had grown to revere Stalin as the man who had defeated fascism in World War II. For years, residents of Gori gathered at the museum to commemorate his birth and death.

More recently, however, as Georgia has sought to place Stalin in his proper historical context, Russia has been busy rehabilitating him. In a quasi-reversal of Khrushchev’s secret speech, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said, during a national TV appearance in December, that it is “impossible to make a judgment in general” about Stalin. As president, Putin called the downfall of the

Soviet Union “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe” of the twentieth century and pushed for Russian school textbooks to portray Stalin in a more positive light. (A manual issued to teachers states that Stalin behaved “entirely rationally ... as a consistent supporter of reshaping the country into an industrialized state.”) At one of Putin’s first meetings with Georgia’s pro-Western President Mikheil Saakashvili, who was elected in 2004 following the Rose Revolution that forced former Soviet bureaucrat Eduard Shevardnadze from power, the Russian leader reportedly said, “Thanks for giving us Stalin.”

The Kremlin’s readoption of Stalin has only given Georgia’s Westward-looking leaders even greater incentive to reject him. “In the new Georgia, Stalin is no longer Georgian,” Montefiore says. “He’s a Russian emperor.” In 2006, Saakashvili opened the Museum of Soviet Occupation across the street from the parliament in Tbilisi. Putin was said to have been so incensed that he complained about it to Saakashvili in a face-to-face meeting. Acknowledging that Stalin and his ruthless secret police chief Lavrenti Beria were of Georgian stock, Saakashvili reportedly replied that Putin could build a museum of Georgian oppression in Moscow and that he would donate the funds for it.

“NATURAL GAS WILL PROVIDE AN INCREASING SHARE OF AMERICA’S ENERGY NEEDS OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL DECADES.”

NY TIMES, JUNE 2010

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WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR? PUT AMERICAN NATURAL GAS TO WORK FOR AMERICA NOW.

LATE ONE NIGHT in June, a group of workers began to wrap cables around the Stalin statue in Gori. A police cordon encircled the monument, in order to keep away anyone who might object to what was about to happen. Soon enough, a small crowd gathered and watched as the workers hoisted the statue from its pedestal with a crane, laid it onto a flatbed truck, and drove away. Two days later, government authorities pulled off a similar nocturnal sacking of another Stalin monument, this time in the western town of Tkibuli.

This wasn't, to be sure, quite as dramatic as the toppling of the Saddam Hussein statue in Baghdad. The Georgian government had acted under the cover of darkness for fear of reprisal, perhaps either from Gori's older residents or from locals who make money from the steady trickle of tourists curious about the dictator's hometown. But no backlash came. David Bakradze, the chair-

man of the Georgian parliament and a close Saakashvili ally, says that the removal of the statue was a small act but, nonetheless, an important expression of Georgian principles. "If one thinks of the modern values of Georgia and where Georgia will be tomorrow, Stalin's statue will not be a part of Georgia's future."

The spot in the town square where Stalin stood for 58 years will not be left vacant. In its place will stand, according to Rurua, the culture minister, a new monument "to the victims of this person [Stalin], of the totalitarian regime, and of the August war." As for the statue itself, the government did not destroy it. It will be moved to the courtyard of the revamped museum, to join Stalin's train car and childhood cottage, historical artifacts at last.

JAMES KIRCHICK

James Kirchick is a writer at large for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and a contributing editor at THE NEW REPUBLIC.

American Sublime

The Catskills you don't know.

HAINES FALLS, NEW YORK

LIKE EVERY OTHER summer resident of a rural region, I come to the Catskills to get away from my life. If winter is when we second-home owners disappear like pale ghosts into our routines and our urban surroundings, then summer is the time when nature is supposed to restore us to our ruddier, truer, more spontaneous selves. Driving around in my SUV, thinking "Glory be for dappled things," I amuse myself by imagining that, down in the valley, civilization has screeched to an end, and that my family and I will revert to our instincts and live by our wits. But the northeastern Catskills offer something else, too, something I like to think no other American range offers, at least, not to the same extent. The Catskills have history, a past so inescapable that it makes my little escape fantasy look like a willful refusal to acknowledge the human presence all around me. If you hike to a ledge, it will still yield the Romantic vision of unpeopled America that

first took shape here—the gnarled trees, tall waterfalls, and long views down crooked cloves beloved by the painters of the Hudson River School. But a closer examination of the second-growth forest and bare mountainsides, where erosion has made the trees fall down, will suggest how deeply people are implicated in the landscape. The Catskills, whose natural resources were long ago depleted and whose tourism industry has never

nature will revert to its noble sublimity once we stop torturing it. Wild mainly in the sense of being un-manicured, at least in comparison to the more agrarian counties to the east, crisscrossed by the ruins of tanneries and bluestone quarries and old hotels, this place is a depressive-realist's dream vacation spot, a Detroit of the natural world.

Let me explain which Catskills I'm talking about. I'm not talking about the Borscht Belt, the Grossinger's-and-tumblers' Catskills, that is to say, the rolling hills in the western counties indelibly associated with Danny Kaye, Jewish singles, and indoor tennis. I'm talking about a much taller Catskills, farther to the east, whose 2,200-foot-high escarpment looms up on the left of drivers traveling north on I-87 toward Albany or Montreal. I've got in mind the dark-blue, fairy-tale land of Rip Van Winkle and Natty Bumppo, a region once famous for its brooding hemlocks and elegant mountain hotels and notorious for turning Jews away from them. I'm talking about mountaintop towns with names like Tannersville and Hunter and Windham that look today, to the casual passer-through, like little more than a series of slope-scarring ski resorts and struggling downtowns, and about a network of springs and streams tenuously protected against overdevelopment and the riskier methods of oil drilling by New York City, which draws its drinking water from the area.

More specifically, I'm thinking of my own village, Haines Falls, a picturesque, diminished gateway to a spot known, in its better days, as Pine Orchard. This is the site of North and South Lake and the much-painted Kaaterskill Falls, and it was once the site of the Catskill Mountain House, from whose veranda the great mid-nineteenth-century artists Thomas Cole, Frederic Church, Asher Durand, and Sanford Gifford, as well as the naturalist John Burroughs, were able to see the Hudson Valley spread out before them like "all creation,"

as James Fenimore Cooper put it in *The Pioneers*. On very clear days, they could also see the Berkshires of Massachusetts and the Green Mountains of Vermont. This is the exact spot on which Ameri-



The vanguard of American life.

quite recovered from the advent of the automobile (which lets people zoom through without stopping, or else spend the night cheaply car-camping), provides a useful corrective to our naive faith that

LAKE COUNTY MUSEUM/CORBIS

can landscape painting was born (previously, Americans went to Europe to paint mountains), as was the notion that America's wilderness, less worked-over and more extreme than Europe's, was somehow bound up with our destiny and character. From this glorification of virgin territory, it was a relatively short step to the modern environmental movement. This makes it all the more remarkable to stumble upon the old photographs that line the walls of many second homes here and realize that, when these pictures were taken more than a century ago, the mountains had been completely denuded, the slopes reborn as sheep meadows, and the rivers and fish all but destroyed. The cause of this devastation was the tanning industry, which cut down the hemlock forest for its tannin-rich bark and sent hot, noxious wastewater tumbling down the sides of the mountains.

The Hudson River painters, intent on proving God's presence in the landscape, declined to depict the destruction of the forest, and the tourists who came to the Catskills looking for what they'd seen in the paintings were remarkably good at screening it out too. In *The Catskills: From Wilderness to Woodstock*, historian Alf Evers makes you feel how odd the scene must have been: "Travelers seeking romantic thrills among the Catskills soon met long lines of wagons laden with stinking hides destined for mountain tanneries. ... Those who visited the Catskills in order to see its great primeval forests sometimes saw instead vast mountainsides and hollows covered with bleaching trunks which a long dry spell would convert into fire-blackened wastes." People began to think that hemlock only thrived on the steep slopes and crevices where the loggers hadn't been. As environmental historian David Stradling documents in his 2007 *Making Mountains: New York City and the Catskills*, when the trees were gone, farms replaced them, and when those failed, too, and the owners defaulted on their taxes, the state appropriated the land and made it over into "wilderness," defined as a place attractive to hikers and fishermen, with well-stocked streams, scenic campgrounds, marked trails, and lush young forests (the less mature a forest, the thicker the underbrush).

Meanwhile, cars and highways allowed New York elites to summer in more remote spots, such as Maine and Vermont. Air-conditioning alleviated the need to get away for months at a time and also made visits to the beach—the Hamptons!—more appealing. The

Catskill Mountain House and its fellow grand hotels, Hotel Kaaterskill and the Laurel House, decayed and were abandoned and, finally, burned down. The northeastern Catskills became the land of ethnic and specialty tourism.

And so it remains today. If I drive the five miles between the eastern edge of Haines Falls and the western edge of Tannersville, the next town over, I will pass by or near a defunct Korean Christian camp, a still-working Buddhist retreat, a convenience store that is the main hangout of the region's Harley riders, a German Orthodox synagogue, a Lubavitch Chabad, a Satmar Hasidic summer camp, a hippie restaurant called Maggie's Krooked Cafe, an Italian hotel called Villa Vosilla, a Hutterite compound called the Platte Clove Community, a Latvian summer camp, and a gated community that used to be all German, the summer home of the Liederkrantz Society in Manhattan's Yorkville. When I go swimming at North Lake, I hear a joyous babble of English, Russian, Korean, Portuguese, German, and a yeshivish Yiddish. The old summer colony on the slopes of High Peak, in which my husband and I bought and fixed up a house, is peopled mostly, though not entirely, by WASPs. It's a quiet holdover from the region's exclusivist days, the great-grandsons and great-granddaughters of New York's Episcopalian upper classes reduced, in this multifarious milieu, to just one ethnic group among the rest.

I like to think that the northeastern Catskills, having given birth to one notion of the sublime, a sense of awe and terror before God's power as manifest in nature, has given birth to another, a sense of awe and terror at the astonishing diversity of humankind. Because of the trees, because of the way the roads wind around the crags, because you can see down into the valley more easily than you can see what's happening over on the next peak, these mountains readily accommodate communitarian or separatist dreams. You can settle here, with your kin or your kind, and never have to interact with outsiders. Others remain other. Assimilation is not required. Up here, we don't fool ourselves into thinking that Americans are a single people capable of mutual understanding. We know that we're many and distinct and often incompatible, and we settle for mutual toleration. We're cordial, but correct, in that laconic mountain way. In this, we here in the northeastern Catskills are, once again, in the vanguard of American life.

JUDITH SHULEVITZ

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The Unnecessary Fall

A counter-history of the Obama presidency.

JOHN B. JUDIS

ON APRIL 14, 2009, as Barack Obama's standing in the polls was beginning to slip, and as Tea Party demonstrators were amassing in Washington for tax day protests, the president gave a lengthy address at Georgetown University explaining the "five pillars" of his economic policies. The speech was intended to promote a memorable slogan for Obama's program that would evoke comparisons with Theodore Roosevelt's Square Deal, Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society.

Obama's contribution was to be the New Foundation. "We must lay a *new foundation* for growth and prosperity—a foundation that will move us from an era of borrow and spend to one where we save and invest," he declared. Obama would repeat the phrase seven times that day and on many more occasions over the next months. At Obama's private White House dinner with presidential historians that June, the historians were no more impressed than the public with the New Foundation as a slogan. "I don't think it's going to work," Robert Dallek warned. Doris Kearns Goodwin said it sounded "like a woman's girdle."

One of these historians might have been able to forewarn Obama that the slogan had been unsuccessfully deployed by a Democratic president once before. In his 1979 State of the Union address, Jimmy Carter began, "Tonight, I want to examine in a broad sense the state of our American Union—how

we are building a *new foundation* for a peaceful and a prosperous world." Carter would use the phrase five times in the speech, including in its conclusion, where he asked members of Congress to join him "in building that new foundation." Like Obama's effort, the phrase inspired, at most, a few underwear jokes and was then forgotten.

Obama's evocation of Carter was obviously unintended—but the Man from Plains is indeed the specter now hanging over his presidency. Of course, Obama has already accomplished more in his first 20 months than Jimmy Carter did during his entire presidency. But there is a disturbing political resemblance between the two presidencies. Both men ran inspired campaigns in which they positioned themselves above the scandals and partisan quarrels of their predecessors and initially stirred hopes of a "transformational" presidency. But, as presidents, both men somehow failed to connect with large parts of the electorate.

To be sure, there are a number of very specific reasons why Carter and Obama landed in political trouble. Both men contended with rising unemployment—Carter with rampant inflation as well—and voters' approval of a president and his party tend to track closely with changes in the economy. Carter faced friction in his own party and the rise of a powerful business lobby, and Obama has dealt with a Republican Party that has frustrated his dreams of a post-partisan presidency. Yet the most important reason for their difficulties—evident in

their inept attempts to brand their programs—has been an inability to develop a politics that resonates with the public.

In the United States, politics pivots around the allegiance of the middle class, even as its identity has changed from yeoman farmers and mechanics to store clerks, office workers, x-ray technicians, and small business owners. They are, in Bill Clinton's words, "those who work hard and play by the rules." They are the central characters in a populist rhetoric that goes back to the early republic. It depicts the middle class as embattled and threatened either from forces below (impoverished immigrants, welfare cheaters, ghetto rioters) or above (Wall Street speculators, state bureaucrats, K Street lobbyists). Populism can be embraced by Glenn Beck or Tom Harkin. It is intrinsically neither left-wing nor right-wing.

Politicians, such as Franklin Roosevelt or Ronald Reagan, who found a way of using populism's appeal during downturns have enjoyed success, while those who have spurned it have suffered accordingly. If, in circumstances like the present one, you don't develop a populist politics, your adversaries will use populism to define you as an enemy of the people. That's what Carter discovered during the stagflation of the late '70s. And that's what has happened in the last 20 months of the Great Recession to Barack Obama and to the Democratic Party he leads.

OBAMA TOOK OFFICE with widespread popular support, even among Republicans, and some of his first efforts, including the \$800 billion stimulus, initially enjoyed strong public favor. But that wide appeal began to dissipate by the late spring of 2009. Disillusion with Obama fueled the November defeat of Democratic gubernatorial candidates in New Jersey and Virginia. By January 2010, it was a crucial factor in Republican Scott Brown's astonishing victory over Martha Coakley in Massachusetts.

In the postmortem debate over these defeats, some Democrats have blamed Obama's dogged pursuit of health care reform while the economy was hemorrhaging jobs. That may have been a factor, but the real damage was done earlier. What doomed Obama politically was the way he dealt with the financial crisis in the first six months of his presidency. In an atmosphere primed for a populist backlash, he allowed the right wing to define the terms.

As Obama was delivering his inaugural address, the financial crisis was already in full swing; and it was already apparent that financial speculation, outright

fraud, and irresponsible and sometimes illegal housing-loan practices had played a very large role in precipitating the crisis. The public was up in arms. But, instead of rallying the public against the "money changers," as Roosevelt had done in his first inaugural, Obama, taking a leaf from Jimmy Carter's infamous "malaise" speech, put the blame on the public as a whole. "Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age," he declared.

Over the next month, Obama would periodically criticize bankers after embarrassing revelations—at various times calling the bonuses they gave themselves "shameful" and an "outrage"—but, after hearing complaints about his rhetoric from the bankers, he would back off. At a private meeting on March 28 with 13 Wall Street CEOs, the president, his spokesman Robert Gibbs said, "emphasized that Wall Street needs Main Street and Main Street needs Wall Street." And, in his Georgetown speech, Obama returned to his theme of collective responsibility. The recession, Obama said, "was caused by a perfect storm of irresponsibility and poor decision-making that stretched from Wall Street to Washington to Main Street."

Obama's policy followed the same swerving course as his rhetoric. One week, he would favor harsh restrictions on bank and insurance-company bonuses, but, the next week, he would waver; one week, he would support legislation allowing bankruptcy judges to reduce the amount that homeowners threatened with foreclosure owed the banks; the next week, he would fail to protest when bank lobbyists pressured the Senate to kill these provisions. But, more importantly, Obama—in sharp contrast to Roosevelt in his first months—failed to push Congress to immediately enact new financial regulations or even to set up a commission to investigate fraud. (When Congress finally appointed a commission in July 2009, Obama and his party put a milquetoast Democratic politician, former California State Treasurer Philip Angelides, in charge of it.)

Obama's appointments also conveyed an impression that he wanted to let Wall Street off the hook. He appointed Timothy Geithner to be treasury secretary. Geithner claimed that he was not part of Wall Street, but, in his capacity as president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, he had served under a board of directors headed by JP Morgan Chase CEO

Jamie Dimon. As New York Fed president, Geithner had been partly responsible for the decision to let Lehman Brothers go under, for the unpopular TARP program, and for American International Group (AIG) paying back its Wall Street creditors with government money. Geithner chose as his chief of staff a former lobbyist for Goldman Sachs. Retiring Democratic Senator Byron Dorgan told me, "Most Americans were reading about the massive compensations and bailouts, and the administration largely hired people from the culture of Wall Street."

By the spring, Obama's apparent tilt to Wall Street had sparked a right-wing populist revolt in the country. The newly formed Tea Party movement, Beck and Fox News, and a host of right-wing bloggers were leading the charge; but, in a less extreme form, the general public shared their anger. In an early April *New York Times*/CBS News poll, the public disapproved of Obama's aiding the banks by 58 percent to 33 percent. In this same poll, public approval of Obama's handling of the economy began to fall. Pollsters who did focus groups also traced disillusionment with Obama's economic policies to his handling of the financial crisis.

Congressman Barney Frank, who defends Obama's policies, acknowledges that the president's political difficulties began with the revelation that AIG, which had received \$170 billion from the government, had paid out \$165 billion in bonuses to the division that had brought the company down. Geithner had known about the bonuses but insisted there were no legal grounds to block them. (It then came out that Geithner had pressured Senate Banking Committee Chairman Chris Dodd to insert a provision in the stimulus bill that protected the bonuses.) "The pitchforks were out. It added injury to injury," Frank says. That's when public opinion of Geithner plummeted. According to a Rasmussen poll, 24 percent had a favorable view of Geithner and 44 percent an unfavorable one.

The public's view of the bank bailout and the AIG bonuses colored its view of the auto bailout, the stimulus, and health care reform. One of the rallying cries for the populist opposition to Obama was "where's *my* bailout?" (Obama himself acknowledged that it was "one of the most frequent questions" he was asked in letters.) The auto program became a bailout for the Big Three CEOs; the stimulus became a bailout of government itself; and health care reform was a bailout for the uninsured—or "reparations," as Rush Limbaugh put it. Wrote right-wing blogger Michelle Malkin, "hardworking

citizens were getting sick of being played for chumps” by “moochers, big and small, corporate and individual, trampling over themselves with their hands out demanding endless bailouts.” Obama and the Democrats were successfully portrayed as aiding “the moochers,” but not the “hardworking citizens.” In American politics, that’s a recipe for political disaster.

Some in the White House political operation recognized in the late spring that the administration’s economic efforts were being defined by right-wing populism and tried to push Obama to take a more populist tack. A group within the White House began calling themselves the “pitchfork gang,” but they would find their attempts to convince Obama to get tough on Wall Street or on insurance companies undermined by Geithner and by National Economic Council head Larry Summers, who were worried about upsetting business confidence. “There was a continual tension in the White House,” says a person who was privy to the discussions. “One week, we would be very hot, and then, the next week, we would dial it back.”

By early January of this year, Obama was clearly losing the battle for the middle class. According to a CNN poll, 60 percent of Americans thought Obama “had paid more attention to the problems faced by banks and other financial institutions” than to the “problems faced by middle class Americans.” Only 28 percent, barely more than a quarter, thought he had paid more attention to the middle class. As Brown surged ahead of Coakley in the polls, the White House temporarily embraced a populist approach. On January 14, Obama called the bank bonuses “obscene” and said, “we want our money back.” In a January 22 speech at Lorain County Community College in Elyria, Ohio (a far cry from Georgetown), Obama used the word “fighting” 13 times and “fight” nine times. “I will not stop fighting for you,” he declared.

But, faced with a falling stock market and anger from Wall Street, Obama once again turned conciliatory. On February 10, he said that he didn’t “begrudge” the \$17 million bonus awarded to Dimon and the \$9 million to Goldman Sachs CEO Lloyd Blankfein. “I know both guys. They are very savvy businessmen.”

Obama’s reluctance to rail against Wall Street might have led to a watered-down financial reform bill, or even no bill at all, but, on April 16, the Securities and Exchange Commission indicted Goldman Sachs for fraud. The next week, an emboldened Obama went to New

York to criticize the bankers directly for their “failure of responsibility.” As a result of the indictment and Obama’s rediscovery of his anger, Republicans became somewhat less obstructionist, moderate Republicans broke with the party’s leadership, and moderate Democrats fell into line. Congress produced a much stronger bill than the Democrats had ever expected.

But Obama’s embrace of populism has remained fitful and sporadic. After the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Verizon’s Ivan Seidenberg, the head of the Business Roundtable, criticized Obama for being anti-business in June, the president dispatched Geithner, White House aide Valerie Jarrett, and Bill Clinton to appease the business community. Obama has said enough to anger the CEOs, but he has failed to convey to the greater public that he is fighting for them.

Obama’s unwillingness to buck Wall Street and the Business Roundtable, along with his delayed and muddled response to the BP disaster in the Gulf, has eroded the public’s confidence in his leadership. In Pew’s midyear report card on Obama’s image, the greatest drop from February 2009 to this June was in the perception of Obama as a “strong leader.” Voters will sometimes tolerate policies they question from presidents like John Kennedy or Reagan, whom they regard as “strong,” but not from politicians like Jimmy Carter, whom they regard as weak.

WHAT OF THE other factors behind Obama’s political difficulties? There is no doubt that, if the economy were growing faster, and if unemployment were dropping below 9 percent, Obama and the Democrats would be more popular and not fearing a November rout. But, unfortunately, the economy’s sluggish recovery cannot be completely disentangled from the White House’s weak political performance.

In January, when the White House debated how large a stimulus to propose, Christina Romer, the head of the Council of Economic Advisors, proposed a \$1.2 trillion Keynesian jolt. David Obey, the chairman of the House Budget Committee, told *The Fiscal Times* that Obama’s Treasury Department asked initially for a \$1.4 trillion bill. But the administration finally proposed a stimulus between \$700 and \$800 billion that included large tax cuts that were more likely to stimulate saving than consumption—and spending that would be unlikely to produce many jobs until the end of Obama’s first term. In the stimulus’s first year, the ad-

ministration spent only \$17 billion of the \$139 billion allocated for infrastructure spending.

Prominent economists, including Paul Krugman and Joseph Stiglitz, made the case that a much larger stimulus was necessary to reverse (rather than merely reduce) the rise in unemployment, and that, if a modest stimulus failed to reduce unemployment, Republicans would convince the public that the stimulus was toxic medication and would block additional Keynesian measures. That argument has been proven sadly correct. Some White House advisers appear to have underestimated the depth of the Great Recession. Others seem to have doubted the administration had the political clout to get more from Congress.

But the White House might have gotten more if Obama had proclaimed a national economic emergency (which it was); framed the issue in terms of rescuing the middle class from damage done by Wall Street speculators, short-sighted CEOs, and Chinese mercantilism; and directly attacked Republicans as heartless obstructionists. When Obama belatedly made this sort of case on the eve of the financial reform vote this year, he got a much stronger bill than anyone had anticipated. So it’s not clear that the failure to get a larger stimulus—which has ended up hurting the administration politically—wasn’t itself a result of political timidity.

The president has also suffered from an inability to explain to the public why he sought such a large stimulus and what he thought it could accomplish. Obama’s New Foundation speech at Georgetown was soon forgotten. Afterward, Obama, to the dismay of Democrats in Congress and some of his White House aides, pretty much dropped the jobs issue. From then to Labor Day, he devoted a July visit to Buffalo and an August stop-over in southern Indiana to the issue—at a time when the right wing was mobilizing against him. Obama didn’t just fail to develop a consistent narrative about the economy; he didn’t really try.

Contrast Obama’s attempt to develop a politics to justify his economic program with what Reagan did in 1982. Faced with steadily rising unemployment, which went from 8.6 percent in January to 10.4 percent in November, Reagan and his political staff, which included James Baker, Mike Deaver, and Ed Rollins, forged a strategy early that year calling for voters to “stay the course” and blaming the current economic troubles on Democratic profligacy. “We are clearing away the economic wreckage that was dumped in our

laps,” Reagan declared. Democrats accused them of playing “the blame game,” but the strategy, followed to the letter by the White House for ten months, worked. The Republicans were predicted to lose as many as 50 House seats, but they lost only 26 and broke even in the Senate.

Some commentators have noted Reagan’s popularity was even lower than Obama’s. But, on key economic questions, he did much better than Obama and the Democrats are currently performing—and voters expressed far greater patience with Reagan’s program. According to polls, even as the unem-

(although not in open opposition to) the city’s Democratic machine. He was also a post-racial politician who eschewed the hard-edged, angry rhetoric of Jesse Jackson. (That, too, is oddly reminiscent of Carter, who partly campaigned in 1976 as the white Southern antidote to George Wallace’s angry racial populism.)

Obama carried this outlook into the U.S. Senate, into his campaign for the presidency, and then, into the presidency itself. He is a cerebral, dispassionate, post-partisan; he wants to “end the political strategy that has been based on division,” to “turn the page” on the cul-

Doris Kearns Goodwin told Obama that his slogan, the New Foundation, sounded “like a woman’s girdle.”

ployment rate climbed, a narrow plurality still expressed confidence that Reagan’s program would help the economy. On the eve of the election, with the unemployment rate at a postwar high, a *New York Times*/CBS News poll found that 60 percent of likely voters thought Reagan’s economic program would eventually help the country. That’s a sign of a successful political operation. If Obama could command those numbers, Democrats could seriously limit their losses in November. But Obama has not been able to develop a narrative that could convince people to trust him and the Democrats.

WHY HAS the White House failed to convince the public that it is fighting effectively on its behalf? The principal culprit is clearly Barack Obama. He has a strange aversion to confrontational politics. His aversion is strange because he was schooled in it, working as a community organizer in the 1980s, under the tutelage of activists who subscribed to teachings of the radical Saul Alinsky. But, when Obama departed for Harvard Law School in 1988, he left Alinsky and adversarial tactics behind.

The young lawyer who returned to Chicago and won a seat in the Illinois state Senate in 1996 practiced a very different style of politics. Obama’s principal accomplishments in Springfield were bills restricting lobbying and requiring videotaping of confessions in potential death penalty cases. He was not a typical blue-collar, bread-and-butter Chicago Democrat, but the kind of good government liberal that represents the upscale districts of the city, seeing in politics a higher calling and ill at ease with

ture wars of the 1960s and the partisan battles of the 1990s. During the campaign, his aides jokingly referred to him as the “black Jesus.” While he can tolerate and even brush aside conflict, he is reluctant to actively foment it. “In a time of crisis, we can’t afford to govern out of anger,” he declared in February 2009. During his campaign and his first year in office, he held to a blind faith in bipartisanship, even as the Republicans voted as a bloc against his legislation. He is, perhaps, ill-suited in these respects for an era of bruising political warfare.

His advisers have clearly reinforced these inclinations. In the campaign, they fashioned him as the outsider candidate of “hope” and “change” and have extended this strategy into the presidency itself. They see him as standing above party. In a meeting with congressional leaders last April, senior adviser David Axelrod rejected the complaint that Obama accorded equal blame to Democrats and Republicans with his descriptions of the “cynical politics in Washington.” Within the White House, top aides still speak of promoting the Obama “brand.” Organizing for America, the administration’s campaign organization, which is supposed to be focusing on the 2010 elections, recently devoted its resources to organizing parties across the country to celebrate Obama’s forty-ninth birthday.

These efforts to elevate Obama above the hurly-burly of Washington politics have been disastrous. Obama’s image as an iconic outsider has become the screen on which Fox News, the Tea Party, radical-right bloggers, and assorted politicians have projected the image of him as a foreigner, an Islamic radical, and a socialist.

He has remained “the other” that he aspired to be during the campaign, but he and his advisers no longer control how that otherness is defined.

The White House and cabinet officials he appointed have reinforced his aversion to populism. As Jonathan Alter recounts in *The Promise: President Obama, Year One*, Geithner and Summers repeatedly blocked attempts to get tough on Wall Street on the grounds that doing so would threaten the recovery itself by upsetting the bankers. For most of his first year, Alter writes, “Obama bought the Geithner-Summers argument that the banks were fragile and couldn’t be confronted while they remained in peril.” Its reluctance to come down on the bankers crippled the administration politically, making it far more difficult for it to get its way with Congress on a second stimulus program that would have boosted the recovery and Democrats’ political prospects. Bad politics can trump good policy.

POPULISM HAS profound shortcomings as a worldview. It tends toward demagoguery. In its relentless focus on the middle class, it can ignore or stigmatize those below it. It can prove hostile to a long-range scientific outlook. A more populist Obama, for instance, might have postponed the battle for climate change legislation or national health insurance and probably would have taken a weaker stand on immigration. But populism has been an indelible part of the American political psyche, and those who are uncomfortable making populist appeals, like Hoover or Carter—or, more recently, presidential candidate John Kerry—suffer the consequences at the polls.

If Obama’s politics leads to a Republican takeover of one or both houses of Congress, and even to a Republican president in 2012, then much of what Obama has accomplished could be undone. It’s unlikely that a new Republican president and Congress would actually repeal the health care or the financial reform bill. But the former could be starved of public funds and deprived of regulatory oversight; and the latter could be neutered by a hostile treasury secretary and by weak or hostile presidential appointees to the Securities and Exchange Commission or the new Consumer Financial Protection Agency. Reform legislation needs administrations and congresses committed to reform. That is where politics has to come in; and that’s where the Obama administration, with its aversion to populism, has fallen short. ♦

Goodbye to Berlin

How Germany became a thorn in America's side.

NOAM SCHEIBER

IN EARLY FEBRUARY, the top financial officials of seven major industrialized countries gathered in Canada to mull the state of the world economy. To grease their interactions, the Canadians had created an intimate setting in Iqaluit, an Inuit town near the Arctic Circle. A planning document waxed on about fireside chats at a cozy inn and decreed that the attire would be casual. It touted an array of cultural activities to supplement the official meetings and even promised the summiteers matching parkas.

Many of the middle-aged technocrats embraced the spirit of the occasion, trading in their bankers' uniforms for chinos. A photo of Mervyn King, the British central bank governor, shows him splayed out on a careering dogsled, sporting a child-like expression of terror and glee. But, amid all the A-list bonding, the Americans seemed slightly aloof. Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner shuffled through the first day of meetings clad in a dour-looking business suit. (Though he did halfheartedly don a wool sweater the following day.) The U.S. delegation arrived too late to partake in the sledding.

The contrast could be interpreted as a sign of things to come. Geithner had been caught off guard by the reach of the Greek fiscal crisis. Heading into the weekend, he and his top international aide, Lael Brainard (now an under secretary at Treasury) were concerned that it could trigger a panic across Europe which, if uncontained, might spread to the United States and Asia. But, when they politely broached the subject with their European counterparts, they encountered a curious passivity. "As the meetings progressed, it was more, 'Okay, what's the plan?'" recalls one American official.

Much of the problem resided with the Germans. Though senior officials, like Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, were sympathetic to a bailout, their political overseers in Angela Merkel's chancellery were conflicted. The reality was that, as the continent's dominant economic player, Germany would find itself heavily bankrolling any such effort. Instead, Merkel's government preferred to place responsibility on the Greeks, arguing that, if they took the austerity measures the Germans were urging, the markets would calm and the turmoil would pass. "You had to have credible contributions by Greece," says one German government official, adding that it was the only way the parliament might eventually approve a bailout.

The Americans were dismayed. "It's fair to say . . . we were hoping they'd be beyond the realm of thought experiments," says an administration official. "That they'd be ready with a plan." But, thanks to the German stalemate, the Europeans were in little position to act.

Nor is the European debt crisis the only issue that Washington and Berlin have tangled over of late. For months, top U.S. officials have begged the Germans to stay the course on their modest stimulus measures, fearing that a too-quick withdrawal would hamstring the European recovery and pose risks to the global economy. But the Germans have stood firm, rejecting the administration's Keynesian logic with rhetoric that can sound gratingly reminiscent of Republican talking points.

The Germans even dragged their feet over a stress test of European banks, complicating efforts to restore confidence in the continent's balky financial system.

Welcome to economic stewardship in the age of German parochialism. For years, the Germans could be relied upon to play a stabilizing role in Europe, subsuming their national self-interest to lofty visions of continental solidarity. But, over the last decade, as German leadership has passed from the postwar generation of Konrad Adenauer and Helmut Kohl to a younger generation less compelled by the war's memory and unbothered by the Soviet menace, the Germans have ceased to view Europe's safekeeping as their historical responsibility. "It's no longer Europe at any price," says Ulrike Guérot, a fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations in Berlin. "It has a price now, and they want to see the price tag."

In normal times, an American president might be happy to leave the Europeans to adapt to this new German posture. But, with the global economy still fragile after the calamity of 2008 and dodgy-looking debt from the likes of Greece and Portugal giving the world's banks another round of agita, the new, more inward-looking German mindset is creating anxiety in Washington.

AT NEARLY 68, Wolfgang Schäuble is an old Christian Democrat of the Helmut Kohl mold—a product of the center-right politics that guided the country's postwar integration into Europe. Though only twelve years younger, his boss, Angela Merkel, grew up in the communist East, where few were given to dreaming of Germany as the continent's benevolent hegemon. German politicians of Merkel's generation tend to be unsentimental. They believe ordinary Germans crave good jobs and sound pensions, not historical missions.

As in most matters European, one telling divide involves the French. German politicians of the Schäuble persuasion tend to think reverentially of their neighbor to the west. Their preferred metaphor for the relationship is "rider and horse," with the French as the rider, the source of political leadership, and the Germans as the horse, providers of financial wherewithal. By contrast, Merkel and her ilk are less apt to think of the French as statesmen than as moochers and meddlers. In their eyes, "free rider and horse" might be more like it.

Even at the height of the cold war, the U.S.-German relationship was hardly seamless in the realm of economic affairs. For decades, the Germans cultivated a reputation as the tightfisted disciplinarians of the international system, leaving American administrations chafing at their Teutonic intransigence. But, as long as Schäuble and his predecessors were at the helm, Germany was reliably generous when it came to Europe, giving Washington one less geopolitical headache to worry about.

A succession of German governments made European integration possible by transferring enormous wealth to the continent's periphery. "All through the decades after World War II, the leaders were saying to their German compatriots, 'We must be ready and willing to pay the bills at the EU level. It's our

passage back into the community,” says Jackson Janes, an expert on U.S.-German relations at Johns Hopkins University. Germany also set aside its geopolitical ambitions in favor of NATO, whose forces it housed. In the late '90s, Kohl gave up the deutsche mark for the euro, lending the country's hard-won financial credibility to the continent's lesser economic lights. This was not something that tickled the average German.

It's only over the last ten years, with the Soviets gone and unification largely behind it, that Germany has become as content as it is prosperous. The distant past no longer weighs on its leaders' every waking thought. On questions of Europe, German politicians have begun to resemble pretty much every other kind of politician: self-interested, opportunistic, and highly solicitous of public opinion. For example, one of the conditions the Germans imposed on their neighbors in return for accepting the euro was the so-called Stability and Growth Pact—a strict limit on the deficits a eurozone country could run. In 2002, after the Portuguese had violated the limit, the Germans insisted on a review process designed to prune their deficit. The following year, after the Germans had breached the limit, they simply told the nominal authorities in Brussels to buzz off. It was a move that rankled the rest of the continent—akin to watching your father take away your brother's cigarettes ... and proceed to smoke them himself.

The new attitude pervades more than just the political sphere. Last year, the German constitutional court handed down a ruling challenging the validity of a prominent EU treaty on the grounds that it was undemocratic. As a practical matter, the ruling meant Germany was assuming the right to pick and choose which EU laws it would abide by, something no other European country has claimed.

Perhaps there's no better barometer of this transformation than the German media. In the run-up to the monetary union in the late '90s, German newspapers showcased arguments both for and against swapping the country's deutsche marks for euros, even as the broader population was adamantly opposed. As the Greek crisis gained momentum this year, the media were almost uniformly against intervening, just like the country at large. “They all argued that Merkel is right, don't pay for the lazy Greeks,” says Guérot. “It was hard to get a different argument across.”

ON THE evening of Sunday, May 9, officials from France, Germany, and Britain were holed up in Brussels haggling. The panic that had started in Greece was spreading across the continent, and the negotiators were desperate to stop the contagion. Every so often, one would join a conference call with senior financial bureaucrats from the United States, Japan, Canada, and elsewhere in Europe to update their progress.

This continued until around eleven o'clock, at which point the updates abruptly ceased. For the next few hours, there was silence on the Brussels end of the line. “Why can't they make up their minds?” European Central Bank president Jean-Claude Trichet wondered aloud at one point. Nobody wanted to find out what would happen if the Asian markets opened before a plan was finalized. One participant recalls privately despairing that the world economy was toast.

If there had been a way to avoid this financial cliffhanger, it's not obvious what it was. From the outset, the watchword at Treasury had been “humility”—it being a

than writing op-eds saying—no offense—the Europeans don't know what the hell they're doing ... they said to the Greeks and our European partners, ‘We're prepared to support [an intervention], but you have to decide your own business.’”

By late April, no amount of wishful thinking could hide the fact that Greece was plummeting, and the Germans reluctantly blessed a \$150 billion loan package long championed by the French. The problem was that the turmoil now extended all the way to Spain—a major economy with debt socked away in banks on several continents. If Spain defaulted, it could mean a Lehman-like catastrophe. The Americans began urging the Europeans to enact further-reaching measures, not simply put out fires as they ignited. But, according to one American official, there were “political constraints.” If nothing else, the German parliament first had to endorse the Greek deal, no certainty. “I think there was always the hope that [Greece] would be it,” says Brainard.

Perhaps predictably, the Greek bailout did little to restore calm when it was an-

A younger generation of Germans, less compelled by the war's memory, is creating heartburn in Washington.

Geithner tenet that lecturing other countries on their own self-interest is futile at best, and often counterproductive. It was a view Brainard shared. She'd been the top international economic official at the White House during the Asian crises of the late '90s and had pushed back when Treasury tried to micromanage the afflicted countries. Throughout the winter and early spring, Geithner and Brainard had generally held back, content to ask pointed questions of the Europeans rather than lobby for a particular outcome.

This seemed advisable. Back home, the coalition Merkel had formed the previous September was beginning to fray, leaving her party vulnerable heading into a major regional election. The Germans would plead that they couldn't be counted on to help Greece because the country's constitutional court might disapprove. Suffice it to say, they wouldn't be opening up their wallets until they had no choice—and, even then, no further than they had to. “The U.S. administration played it quite well,” says Ted Truman, a former Treasury and Fed official. “Rather

nounced on May 2. By the middle of the week, the European markets were convulsing. German voters could see that even their economy might be sideswiped. This at least gave Geithner and Brainard cover to weigh in on details, and they backed a French proposal for a continent-wide bailout fund. Soon, the Europeans were floating numbers across the Atlantic, and the Americans were shooting them down. “Geithner ... basically said, ‘You're not in the ballpark,’” recalls an American official. “If the markets are expecting something on the order of X, it has to be X times Y.”

One German government official working in this area says he found the Americans pushy during this time. Bertrand Benoit, a spokesman for the German finance ministry, says the discussions were constructive: “Their views were made very clear to us,” he recalls, “but it wasn't anything that we would interpret as being pushy or unwarranted.” Whatever the case, the practical effect was to nudge the Germans along. In the 24 hours between Saturday, May 8, and Sunday, May 9, Geithner and Brainard talked them up by a factor of ten. Barack Obama helped close the deal with



a personal call to Merkel. The Europeans would mobilize roughly \$630 billion, the IMF another \$320 billion.

All that was left to sort out was the way the money would be structured. Merkel chafed at any rescue fund controlled by Brussels but heavily financed by the Germans. She favored loans bundled together from individual countries, which would allow the Germans to dictate terms because they'd be making the largest con-

helping investors distinguish between healthy and unhealthy banks instead of shunning them indiscriminately. Geithner and Brainard believed European banks could benefit from a similar exercise, given that market indicators suggested investors (and other banks) were still eyeing them all warily.

One major sticking point was transparency. For the tests to be useful, investors needed a detailed, bank-by-bank

On one call with the Germans, Timothy Geithner remarked that they sounded “a little bit like Hoover.”

tribution. Bolstered by the Americans, the other European countries insisted it wouldn't work. Finally, sometime after two o'clock in the morning, they struck a Rube Goldberg compromise: The bailout fund would be financed by bonds sold to private investors and backed by individual governments. As the strongest economy in Europe, Germany would be on the hook for most of the debt, but it would enjoy a measure of control. The Germans choked it down grudgingly.

In truth, they had reason to be skeptical. The exorbitant interest rates private investors had charged countries like Greece and Portugal reflected an outsize risk of default. Rather than bailing them out, a preferable solution might have been an orderly restructuring—foisting some losses on investors if the borrowers couldn't pay. But, even if you think such a response was workable (and not everyone does), it takes time to arrange. By ignoring the problem for so long, the Germans left themselves no chance to pursue that option.

THERE'S A DANGER in making too much of any one episode, of course. “Countries having financial crises go through the same phases that people diagnosed with serious illnesses do: denial, rage, bargaining, and acceptance,” says Larry Summers, the top White House economic aide. “It takes time.” Perhaps it would be more surprising had the Germans been an exception.

But it's more than just the recent debt crisis. A few weeks after the ink dried on the May 10 deal, Geithner and Brainard traveled to Europe to promote a version of the stress tests that regulators had inflicted on American banks last year. The exercise involves projecting how a bank's balance sheet might perform if the economy were to weaken. This bolstered the U.S. financial sector by

picture of where the land mines lay. Though some in the government were cooperative, key German regulators resisted, particularly when it came to holdings of Greek debt. They invoked national laws saying they couldn't force banks to disclose information.

German officials also suggested to reporters that the real problems were in Spain, where a real-estate bust had pummeled the banks. “The Spaniards were very upset about that,” says Jacob Funk Kirkegaard of the Peterson Institute for International Economics. “They felt actually the German government leaks forced up the bond yields of Spanish treasuries.” In fairness, the Germans were hardly the only ones talking down other countries' banks. But, in a sense, that's the issue: There was a time when the Germans didn't behave like everyone else.

And then, there's the matter of stimulus. The Americans and Germans spent a stretch of the spring debating the right time to close the stimulus spigot and start narrowing their deficits. The Americans, haunted by the Great Depression, worried that countries would cut back too quickly and relapse into recession. The Germans, haunted by their own interwar experience, worried that deficits would lead to a debilitating inflation.

On one level, this debate is nothing new: Policymakers in the United States and Germany have made variations on these arguments for decades. Likewise, as the Germans are quick to point out, they're not reining in their spending as quickly as the rhetoric suggests.

But, on another level, it was one more instance of Germany turning away from Europe. After all, the point isn't whether Germany is cutting spending at a modest pace—it clearly is. The point is that it's doing so at a time when the rest of

the continent—Greece, Portugal, Spain, and even Britain—have savagely shrunk their own budgets to reassure bond traders. German interest rates, by contrast, are soothingly low, meaning Germany can increase its deficits painlessly in the short run. In an ideal world, Germany might relieve some of the pressure on its neighbors by increasing spending, which would generate demand for their exports, bolster their economies, and generally help secure the global recovery. Alas, the Germans have been unmoved by such pleas. They've pledged to stand with the Europeans on fiscal austerity, prompting Geithner to tell them on one call that the approach sounded “a little bit like Hoover.”

The Germans have narrow, technical reasons for this position—some of them quite reasonable. But the more basic reality is that Germans no longer see their prosperity tied so closely to the continent. One increasingly common refrain in Germany these days is a call to focus on BRICS, not PIIGS. The idea is that, because its neighbors lag so far behind economically, Germany must look beyond Europe (“PIIGS” literally refers to Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Spain) to markets in Russia and China (“BRIC” stands for those two countries, plus Brazil and India), where it has flexed its muscles of late. If other European countries want to follow its lead overseas, all the better. But Germany can't slow down to help them catch up.

At the broadest level, the German experience of the last decade is an object lesson in the upshot of “normalization.” As Germany has become a more normal country—less burdened by guilt, more comfortable pursuing its self-interest—it has behaved in ways that are less helpful to Europe and, by extension, the world. But, on balance, the global economy stands to gain more from any normalization trend than it loses. After all, the other major candidate for “normalizing” is China.

Whereas the Germans were unusually enlightened, the Chinese have been unusually disruptive—manipulating their currency, stealing intellectual property, and generally flouting international norms. According to one view, that may be changing on matters of economics: The Chinese stimulated their economy aggressively when it counted, they've started letting their currency appreciate, and they've talked of encouraging their citizens to consume more imports. The question is whether China can save us before Europe buries us. And on that question, the jury is decidedly out. ♦



Books & the Arts

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS YOUNG REBELS

LONG AGO IT EXPANDED into other places, but to think of the Mafia is to think first of Sicily. Partly, of course, this is because of the many films about the Sicilian Mafia, so many that they constitute a genre, and none of which, as far as I have seen, has been less than good. Now comes *The Sicilian Girl*, which sustains the genre in expected and unusual ways.

The expected ways, shamefully gripping, are, as always, the threats and businesslike killing. The less usual ways are in the film's factual basis. In 1991, the diary of a seventeen-year-old girl, which she had kept for five years, helped to bring some Mafia big wheels to justice. (At the start of the long trial, the prosecutor had to fake the girl's age as eighteen so that she would be a legally responsible adult.) What she learned during those five years and what happened during the trial are the coiled substance of the picture.

The director Marco Amenta had already made a documentary about the case, and has returned to the subject presumably to depict nuances of character. This is Amenta's first feature, and he has savored the chance to use what his subject provides: as he tells his sinister story, he explores a Sicilian village in all its crannies and vistas of charm, and he draws Sicilians in affecting colors.

The title character, Rita Mancuso, was born in the village of Balata. Her father is Don Michele, a local dignitary, respected and proud. (Some names of people and places have been changed.) When he walks through the village square with his family, he acknowledges greetings with a regal wave, and some people even kiss his hand. Rita and her brother Carmelo adore him. But early on a shadow falls. There is a Mafia murder in the village, and when Don Michele investigates, there

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**THE
SICILIAN GIRL**
Music Box Films

**JEAN-MICHEL
BASQUIAT:
THE RADIANT
CHILD**
Arthouse Films

are implications we do not expect. Then, because of his relative independence from the bosses, he too is killed. Subsequently, so is his son.

Rita, only eleven years old, sets her course for vengeance, far-off though it may be. Surprisingly, her mother urges her to accept, to forget. As the film proceeds, it unfolds the reasons for the mother's stony reasoning. Though she is a minor character in the story, she is a complex and enlightening one—a woman saturated in the past and probable future of her society. Through the next six years, Rita keeps a specific journal of crime in her village, moving toward the day when she is old enough to act. When she is seventeen, she manages to reach the office of the chief prosecutor in Palermo, who, after investigating, rejoices in this wealth of evidence and puts Rita in a witness protection program.

But the tenor of Rita's crusade has changed, which the prosecutor helps her to see. Her father, the appealing Don Michele, was somehow involved in the Mafia drug trade. So Rita now understands that her campaign is no longer for justice in the purest degree but solely for personal vengeance. Whatever her father and brother may have done, whatever their misdeeds, they were murdered. This alteration in purpose shakes her, but it doesn't deter her.

During her long isolated days in Palermo, enjoined by the police to leave her apartment only to buy food, she nonetheless indulges in a flirtation, later in something more serious. Partly because this is foolish, it is credible. The ending of this story—the trial and its results—are a matter of record; still, I'll let the film bring the news. I'll say only that some of the accused are convicted, and that the mother has a final angry gesture.

Amata has found a youngster named Veronica D'Agostino for Rita who is perfect—that is, she is just good enough to be completely convincing. Anything of an extraordinary performance would, in this case, distract from the verity that the film needs. A French actor, Gérard Jugnot, plays the prosecutor with plentiful reserves of strength and patience. (Query: was a French actor needed because no Sicilian would take on the role?) Lucia Sardo makes the mother a woman who has many reasons to be the way she is. Mirco Garrone has edited the film sinuously, and Luca Bigazzi's camera brings us the beauty of the places where these terrible things are happening.

The perennial dilemma of the Mafia persists. In Sicily and Italy and elsewhere, there are always some incorruptible people fighting it—officially and personally. These people know before they start that they cannot win. One mafioso or another may be eliminated, but Cosa Nostra will continue. No police force or government anywhere expects to eliminate crime completely, but here is a place where the government seems to be facing not a crime ring but a giant shadow government of (presumably) comparable strength. In that sense, *The Sicilian Girl* is one tense chapter in a continuing conflict.



JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT: *The Radiant Child* is a documentary of a pyrotechnical career. The subtitle was the title of an article written about Basquiat when

he was twenty-one, celebrating his meteoric rise as an artist. The film begins, appropriately, with a sequence presenting its setting, Manhattan's SoHo in the 1970s and early 1980s—the district between Houston Street and Wall Street, which in those years was a kind of carnival of artistic outburst and unconventional life. Certainly those aspects have not utterly disappeared in SoHo, but in those days some of us other Manhattanites felt that we were living in a normal house where, in a downstairs room, a lively party was continuously rollicking on. Tamra Davis, who made this film, has quickly brushed in the way things looked. Just one omission: there is no mention of the theater activity down there at the time, Off-Broadway and Off-Off Broadway, one of the most prolific periods in American theater history, which influenced and was influenced by everything that was going on around it. Anyway, this is the locale to which Basquiat came in 1977, when he was seventeen.

Davis, who has since directed eight feature films in Hollywood, shot some interview footage with Basquiat in 1985, put it away, and only lately decided to use it as the base of a full-length documentary, filled out chiefly with latter-day interviews of people who knew Basquiat back then. The phrase “talking heads” is once again shown to be a foolish pejorative if the heads talk interestingly, which they certainly do here.

The story begins with what is still a considerable mystery. Why did Basquiat go to SoHo in the first place? Brooklyn-born, the son of an accountant in an average middle-class family, he suddenly decided to alter his life completely. He had been interested in art early on, and his mother encouraged him; still, it is astonishing that this high school senior simply left home and threw himself onto the streets of SoHo. This he did quite literally, sleeping and eating where he could. It is almost as if he discovered his true habitat in SoHo. He got some money from odd jobs and by illustrating postcards, which he peddled in restaurants when possible. He also began to add to the abundant wall art—graffiti and drawings and much else—that festooned the area.

Here is where dealers begin to structure his story. A friend saw some of his wall work and postcards and said that if Basquiat did some drawings, he would sell them. Both things happened. In time—a relatively short time: this whole story is only ten years long—a dealer named Anina Nosei said she would take him on if he did some paintings. He said he didn't have the money for canvas. She gave him

some money. He bought the canvas and made the paintings, and she sold them. In further time, a big Swiss dealer, Bruno Bischoffberger, telephoned Basquiat and asked to become his dealer, and the artist eagerly accepted. Thus, along with the personal account, we get a sketch of the process by which art careers are made. It would be coarse and false to say that price determines popular opinion; still, it is notable that whenever an artist's quality is noted, price is usually also mentioned. (Instance right here: in 2007 Sotheby's sold a Basquiat piece for \$14.6 million.) Apparently, whatever one's view of the quality of an artist's work, big money at least authenticates it as a subject.

I offer no opinion of Basquiat's art other than to say—apropos of the many examples in the film, some of which include crossed-out graffiti—that it seems clear that with the right sponsorship, some patrons would respond. Many of the interviewees use the word “masterpiece” about Basquiat works. One of the critics says that Basquiat took “all the street energies and translated them into high art.” One can certainly sense the energies.

What is inescapable in the film is the effect of Basquiat himself. He is good-

looking, quick, witty, and underneath his lack of pose is some touching self-respect. He had many friends who loved him, including Andy Warhol: in 1996 Julian Schnabel made an enacted film about him. He had many lovers, some of whom speak fondly of him. When he visited Los Angeles, which he did often and where a gallery featured him (and where Davis filmed her interviews), his work sold well and his company was sought.

Drugs entered his life—it's not clear exactly when—and eventually became a fate. The physical pattern became almost predictable, except that the glimpses we are given of him along the way, in Davis's footage and other clips, are always fresh-faced. He died of an overdose in 1988, aged twenty-seven.

The only negative voice about Basquiat's work in the film comes from Hilton Kramer, who is present presumably out of Davis's sense of fair play. But, whether or not one likes the work, Davis's film fascinates as the account of an aerial adventurous spirit. His life took courage and hunger and imagination and, somewhere, humor. It was an ascendant life, brief though it was. What's more, he had charm. ♦

SARAH WILLIAMS GOLDHAGEN ON ARCHITECTURE PARK HERE

A COMMON COMPLAINT of contemporary social criticism is that American society has become more an archipelago than a nation, increasingly balkanized into ethnic, class, faith, and interest groups whose members rarely interact meaningfully with people whose affiliations they do not in large measure share. The pervasiveness of this phenomenon of American self-aggregation can be debated, but its existence is pretty plain. It has been a feature of American culture since at least the 1950s (some would argue long before), when the white middle and upper classes began their mass exodus from cities to settle in more socially and culturally homogeneous suburbs.

In the last several decades, this balkanization has accelerated and taken non-spatial form, mainly owing to the advent of new communications technol-

ogies. The Internet preaches an ideal of “customization” and a cult of “communities of interest,” creating ever-dividing microsplinters of social affinity and similarity, which are then further hardened by the new specialized channels appearing on cable television seemingly every month. All the while, the Internet's listservs, social-networking sites, and blogs seduce users into the illusion that they enjoy a World Wide Web of connections, all to their own kind.

What of the public realm? (The Internet is a realm somewhere between public and private: a new hybrid universe.) For decades, urban historians, social theorists, and pundits have been predicting or la-

menting the demise of this amorphously defined yet inarguably important social form: some kind of arena, typically physical, in which a large number of people—different people—regularly interact. For Arendt, its paradigmatic form was the


THE HIGH LINE
NEW YORK CITY

**MILLENNIUM
PARK**
CHICAGO

CITYGARDEN
ST. LOUIS

agora. Habermas (who also identified it in the media) located it in northern Europe's taverns and pubs. More recently, sociologists, cultural theorists, and architectural and urban critics have acknowledged that the sort of political discourse championed by Arendt and Habermas does not often unfold in public places but have not significantly revised this characterization of the public realm: it is an actual place, a place in the city, a place to which people from various classes and walks of life routinely come.

Since the 1970s, three urban forms have been most frequently discussed as potential sites for this sort of social exchange: cultural institutions, streets, and shopping malls. The interest in streets, a legacy of Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, was adopted as the calling card of the Congress for New Urbanism, a politically active organization whose best contribution to American urban planning has been to discourage traditional suburban settlement patterns in favor of higher-density, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use developments. The interest in cultural institutions and shopping malls, a consequence of a decades-long construction binge on these two building types, has held the attention mainly of those who bemoan the public realm's demise into the commodified irrelevance of a merely public place. The forms and meanings of the human interactions that unfold in each of these arenas, and the role of architecture and urban design in their creation and character, continue to be subjects of debate.

Even if political discourse has largely decamped to satellites and networks, democracies need actual physical places in cities where dissimilar people routinely see and interact with others. Encounters in such places must be unstructured and non-goal-oriented, because humans, wired to concentrate on goals when goals are set before them, will focus on people whom they might not otherwise see (or whom they might otherwise choose to ignore) only if the pursuit of concrete goals is withdrawn. Only in such urban places can different peoples bump against one another unintentionally and—one hopes—thereby come to appreciate the company of strangers and the otherness in themselves. Urban streets? Too much chance of personal injury. Cultural centers and shopping malls? Too much class stratification, too many shopping opportunities. The obvious place is the urban park.

The urban park is not one type but many: the neighborhood playground or soccer field, the pastoral retreat from

metropolitan smog and frenzied ways, the vest-pocket slip of a lunch spot, the community garden, the unbuildable swamp redefined as treasured wetlands. Those are not the types of park I wish to discuss here. I prefer to dwell on the centrally located park that is accessible and appealing to many classes of people from different walks of life—the great urban park. It must not be so large that inside it one loses a sense of the city. This type of park is typically important enough (and expensive enough) that municipalities work hard to weave it into the overall identity of the city. Over the course of a given year, many different activities and events happen there—concerts, rallies, festivals, fairs.

AFTER a half-century-long dry spell, major new urban parks have opened in Boston, Chicago, New York City, St. Louis, and Seattle; others in Buffalo, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, Toronto, and elsewhere are in planning or under way. Many sit on, or incorporate into their design, defunct artifacts of the American industrial landscape: railroad yards, lines, and depots; underutilized or disused ports—acres upon acres of cracked concrete or yarrow-covered property, asking to be re-purposed for clean living. The deindustrialization of the American economy that left behind these vacant lands has gone on for generations, but the trend toward re-conceptualizing them as potential public parks is fairly new. One reason why is obvious. Demographic movement in the United States from the 1950s to the 1990s was largely from center to periphery, from city to inner suburb to outer suburb to exurb to edge city. In the last two decades, however, money and people have begun to flow centripetally as well as centrifugally.

Experts applaud this development for many reasons, not least because one clear means of slowing global warming is by moving people, especially resource-gobbling Americans, into more densely populated, resource-efficient, less auto-dependent human settlements. But if live in cities we must, we need to refurbish, re-plan, and re-build them to accommodate the needs of the new era. On this ambitious agenda of social reconstruction in the city we must include shoring up existing infrastructure, building new transportation systems, and facilitating the development of attractive and varied types of affordable housing. But no less essential will be more and better open spaces that aerate the city and allow sunlight to fall into densely populated urban

areas. These will be the public realms of our future.

More and more major urban parks will be constructed in the coming years, so it makes sense to consider carefully some that have recently been completed. Two of the largest are Chicago's Millennium Park, which opened in 2004 and won a Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence in 2009, and the Rose Kennedy Greenway in Boston, which opened in stages in 2007 and 2008 and is not likely to win an award anytime soon. Two important smaller projects, both of which opened in 2009, are Citygarden in St. Louis and the High Line in New York City; the latter recently won prestigious awards from the Urban Land Institute and the Rockefeller Institute. Each of these projects is in one or several ways unique. Even so, considering them together reveals the landscape of contemporary major urban parks: their designs, the politics and economics of their development, and their impact on the urban economic, social, and cultural landscape.

Let's begin with the bad—the Rose Kennedy Greenway, which offers a dispiritingly high number of cautionary tales and directives about the obstacles that lie in wait to stall out such projects. The 1.5-mile-long Greenway sits in downtown Boston atop newly buried sections of Interstates 93 and 90, the most technically complex portion of the controversial sixteen-year-long Central Artery/Tunnel project known as the Big Dig. It was the largest and most expensive (\$22 billion) public-works project in American history, replacing an elevated highway that had bludgeoned its way through the city for nearly half a century, severing its waterfront and historic North End from the adjacent downtown.

What an opportunity: twenty-seven acres linking downtown to harbor in one of America's most celebrated cities! Yet no one could call the Greenway a success. It is not merely bad, it is dreadful, a useless wind tunnel bordered by busy multi-lane streets and skyscrapers of unfortunate pedigree. Chronically underused—"Call it the Emptyway," one headline in *The Boston Globe* advised—its landscape design consists of incoherent and eye-injuring variations in paving flanked by Do-Not-Step-on-the-Grass grass, the occasional water element, and the predictable plant beds. The only exception is the northern portion of the park, designed by the fine firm Gustafson Guthrie Nichol, led by Kathryn Gustafson, who also designed Lurie Garden in Chicago's Millennium Park—but more on that later.

Parsing all that went wrong at the Greenway will be a worthy dissertation topic for some student of urban public policy, but several elements of the story are clear. One is that city officials, with Boston's mayor, Thomas Menino, at the helm, never settled on a firm vision for the Greenway. A second is that the Boston Redevelopment Authority, a city agency, never established a collaborative relationship with the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, the state agency that owns the land, managed the Big Dig, and has little competence in the creation of public space. A third problem, which is especially evident if one compares the experience of Boston to those of the other three cities, is that private donors committed to the city did not coalesce into a politically effective force to countermand the stasis resulting from ineffective public leadership and administration.

A power vacuum ensued, and in the echo chamber of committee meeting rooms, people argued, argued, and argued. Some wanted to keep the Greenway a coherent entity; others wanted to parcel it out into sections and use the space to knit back together neighborhoods that had been rent asunder half a century earlier. Developers wanted to build; environmentalists and self-designated protectors of the public realm insisted that not a single inch be privatized. Paralysis ensued. In the end, the Greenway, underfunded and under-prioritized, was killed by public process.

The Boston experience suggests that for a major urban park to develop, there must be leaders with a strong vision and political clout, garnering public support and funding for the project, shepherding it from design to completion, ensuring that countervailing forces do not derail it. And comparing Boston's failure to the success stories of Chicago, St. Louis, and New York City yields a second lesson: in today's tax-evasive political landscape, high-quality major urban parks typically need more than deft public leadership. Public/private partnerships are essential.

IF CRITICS WERE equipped with bullhorns, I would pull mine out here. The final important lesson to be learned from Boston is that good design is not a luxury. On top of all the other ways the Greenway fails, it fails because it is merely grass and flowers, and the great urban park must be more than that. Even a mediocre urban park poses special design challenges, because so many disparate considerations must be taken into account, requiring myriad talents

and expertise. The great urban park must be architectural, because it needs to resolve the city's large scale with the human body's small scale and hold its own within the aggressive architectural environment that is a city. It must look beautiful in September and beautiful in March. It must sustain the assault of weather, inconstant maintenance, and human despoilment. It must absorb runoff and aerate the environment. The great urban park is infrastructure, garden, architecture, playground, place of public gathering, private lunch spot, gallery for public art. It must be of the city, but itself a distinctive place.

All this requires the landscape architects who design such parks to be masters of their own trade and excellent collaborators, and to be fluent in the various arts of architecture, urban design, sustainability, and political negotiation. Further complicating the task, landscape architects designing the great urban park work for, and answer to, an abstraction: the public. They must be able to think pragmatically about satisfying the demands of those who employ them, and they must be able to think philosophically and sociologically about the generations of people who will be the users of what they design.

Which brings us, inevitably, to Frederick Law Olmstead. He was certainly America's greatest landscape architect, who designed, among others, Manhattan's Central Park and Brooklyn's Prospect Parks. But what, precisely, is the contemporary relevance of the work of a landscape architect whose formative years were spent before the Civil War? How much can the canonical Olmstead teach us, who live out our days in this highly urbanized, environmentally troubled, digitally besotted, socially heterogeneous culture and society? But in the attempt to articulate precisely why the twenty-first-century urban park needs not just good but excellent design, Olmstead may be found hiding behind every embankment, in every *allée*.

Parks and buildings are both parts of cities, but even a poorly designed building acquires an identity simply by virtue of being an object in space that people use. A poorly designed urban park, by contrast, always runs the risk of being merely void: Boston's Greenway is a case in point. Olmstead understood that the great urban park is more than a place for people to appreciate the structure of tulips and feel the grass beneath their feet; and more even than a place where different sorts of people could come at any time for free. Three distinctive features make Olm-

stead's parks more than simply nice: aesthetic coherence, a deep narrative richly told, and the possibility of a transformative personal experience in the city.

Of these lessons, the simplest to explain is the first. The remarkable Central Park, 843 acres, contains playing fields, baseball diamonds, *grandes allées*, formal gardens, a skating rink, a boating lake, and picturesque walking paths. Yet these dozens and dozens of different kinds and moments of experience do not compromise the park's aesthetic coherence. Olmstead's second lesson is that the great urban park must include narration. This lesson addresses form, not content—Central Park's story of restoring equilibrium between city and country is a tale that no contemporary urban park could credibly tell. But formally, designers of today's urban parks will make distinctive places in the cityscape only by telling its users a story (or stories) of their own about their cities and the place of nature and people within them. And Olmstead's first two lessons, aesthetic coherence and storytelling, lead to a third: the great urban park must be designed so that it substantively changes its users' experiences of one another and of the city. This is the sort of project in social transformation that contemporary architects and landscape architects, burned from their elders' experience with some of the misfires of modernism, wrongly shun. Few disagree about the social importance of not just public places but also a public realm. Landscape architects should embrace, and some are doing so, the full responsibility that naturally falls to them.

CHICAGO'S 26.5-acre Millennium Park, St. Louis's 2.9-acre Citygarden, and New York City's High Line have all transformed underused or abandoned areas in the middle of their cities into green, open, public spaces. Each is a popular success, and each has stimulated development, especially residential development, in the immediate area (the figures from Chicago, whose park was completed five years before the other two, are especially impressive), thereby bringing their cities monetary gain and the environmental benefits of increased density. What of their designs, then, and what sort of public realm does each park offer, or—if one accords to design the active role that it merits—construct? In what ways are these parks the public realms we want?

Answering such questions reveals the many ways in which the funding, the politics, and the local circumstances of contemporary urban parks configure

their designs. This is especially evident with regard to Millennium Park, by far the largest of the three, and the contemporary urban park *par excellence*. Chicago's story likely will sound increasingly typical in the coming years: visionary and determined leaders, public and private, doggedly raising money, public and private, all the while negotiating compromises, flooring opponents, and navigating the public process to massage and bulldoze their project to its successful completion.

Millennium Park is a remarkable success by many standards. Sitting atop an underground four-thousand-vehicle parking garage and a depot for the Illinois Central Railroad—boosters call it the world's largest green roof—Millen-

ary—public space, and it has attracted residents to this greener downtown, helping to advance Mayor Richard M. Daley's agenda to make Chicago the "greenest city in America."

Still, Millennium Park is a collection of great moments rather than a great urban park. The initial master plan, drawn up in the 1990s by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, broke up the gently sloping site into "rooms" delineated by architectural elements and planting. While not an innovative idea, it is not in principle a bad one, having been used in formal gardens and parks for centuries. As private funds played an ever-greater role in covering the park's \$490 million cost, the sponsorship of these "rooms" was doled out to various donors (\$220 million from pri-

from locally quarried stone. Other architectural elements, including the nearby McDonald's (yes, them too) bicycle parking facility, as well as the parking garage entrance pavilions, are done in the cool manner of classical modernism. In sum, Millennium Park is, aesthetically speaking, sadly incoherent.

Three sections—Crown Fountain, AT&T Plaza, and Lurie Garden—so successfully overcome the unfortunate synergy of stakeholder-donors and unimaginative design that they make of Millennium Park a successful public realm anyway. The vitality of the first two rests wholly on large sculptures by Jaume Plensa and Anish Kapoor. Both these monuments wrest parkgoers from the inner narrative of their own subjectivity, confronting them with the spectacle of themselves as objects in the unfolding monument of metropolitan life. And bookending Plensa's 232-foot-long shallow reflecting pool in Crown Fountain are 50-foot-tall glass-block towers from which project the faces of Chicago residents of different ages, genders, ethnicities, and faiths, each aligned with the next so that the fountain's water appears to spew forth from their mouths. Although different faces appear in succession, at any given moment two faces appear to be responding to one another in an eerie and captivating dialogue. Anish Kapoor's mirrored *Cloud Gate* ("The Bean") projects distorted reflections of visitors, their movements and groupings, in the surrounding cityscape, giving people little choice but to look at themselves in the context of what surrounds them—the city they inhabit but too often fail to see.

At Millennium Park only Kathryn Gustafson, with Lurie Garden, has created a successful public realm that bears the characteristics of a great urban park. Eschewing the rest of the park's wearying reliance on Beaux-Arts compositional tropes, Gustafson and her collaborators, Robert Irwin and Piet Oudolf, took from the existing site conditions cues toward a plan. Fifteen-foot-high topiary hedges spatially define the garden, separating it from the adjacent open field of Gehry's concert space and the crowded "rooms" along Michigan Avenue. A wood-paved boardwalk, edged on one side by a five-foot-wide, multi-tier reflecting pool, arcs through the garden, tracing an axis that links the north side of the city (and now, Jeanne Gang of Studio Gang's wonderful new Aqua Building) with the Art Institute to the south. Hundreds of native-grown species create a garden divided into light and dark "plates," as spectacular



Lurie Garden, Millennium Park, facing the Modern Wing of the Art Institute of Chicago

nium Park is a vibrant public space, filled on sunny days with camera-toting tourists, white collars tethered to bag lunches, spillover Art Institute visitors eating in the outdoor café, local residents, kids messing around in Crown Fountain, runners stretching, tours on Segways. Twenty million people have visited Millennium Park since it opened. Its (largely unforeseen) economic impact on the city has been extraordinary: Chicago enjoyed a 47 percent increase in leisure travel in the past five years (as compared to a national increase of 6 percent), and 165 new residential developments have opened since 2004. Local retail and commercial profits have soared. Millennium Park has transformed Chicago's East Loop, once a quiet business district largely empty after dark, into a genuine 24/7—okay, not in Janu-

vate donors, though it must be pointed out that this figure includes the cost of the public sculptures and architectural elements). The plan of Millennium Park reads like a section of *Who's Who in American Business*: Wrigley Square, McCormick Tribune Plaza, Crown Fountain, Boeing Galleries North and South, AT&T Plaza, Chase Promenade. These "rooms," like schoolchildren rushing to get the best seats in the auditorium, compete with one another for the front row, creating a visual and sensory cacophony that ultimately fails to differentiate Millennium Park from the city itself. There is Frank Gehry's Jay Pritzker Pavilion, all stainless steel fits and starts. The northwest corner is dressed for the ball, outfitted in neoclassical stairs, balustrades, and colonnades constructed

in February—when uncut grasses and dried-out sedum heads luxuriate in snow—as in floriated May. Architecturally controlled, spatially and topographically varied, Lurie Garden offers visitors a powerful experience of quietude within the city, moments full of wildness, wildflowers, and an ever-changing story about the climate and flora of the Midwestern plains. Here Gustafson and her collaborators elegantly demonstrate how aesthetic coherence, spatial definition, and narrative poesis can create an excellent urban amenity.

BOTH THE HIGH LINE, designed by James Corner Field Operations in collaboration with the architects Diller Scofidio + Renfro, and Citygarden, designed by landscape architect Warren Byrd of Nelson Byrd Woltz, are smaller parks, and so they are more typical of what may appear in coming years. Of the two projects, the High Line is the superior design, but Citygarden is the more compelling example of the social good that a great urban park can bring. Both demonstrate how public officials, working in partnership with private donors, can use these projects to bolster and redefine neighborhoods, cities, and publics.

How a set of abandoned railroad tracks elevated above the western edge of the Chelsea district of Manhattan were transformed into the High Line is a tale that does not need re-telling: it is already the stuff of urban legend. In any case, the gestation of the High Line resembles that of its much larger kin, Millennium Park. But the singular story of Citygarden's origins is less known, and merits more discussion. From 1907 on, St. Louis's city planners envisioned a mile-long strip of park land from the Mississippi River to Union Station (once the busiest train station in the world, now on the National Register of Historic Places); but it was never properly developed. Then the city's fortunes began to fall. St. Louis bled out more than half its population in half a century. By 2000, much of the city center resembled downtown Detroit, a flatland of boarded-up townhouses and vacated office blocks. The mall once imagined as a majestic sweep from riverport to railport became yet another packed-dirt, chickweed-covered vacant lot in yet another gutted downtown.

In 2006, the Gateway Foundation, a private non-profit devoted to creating and paying for new public spaces in and

around St. Louis, brokered an agreement with the mayor's office to build a new public park on the two city-owned blocks stretching between the historic neoclassical Old Courthouse and the stripped neoclassical, Depression-era Civil Courts building. In a nearly unbelievable civic gesture, the Gateway Foundation, on its own, developed Citygarden from start to finish, at a cost of \$30 million and, at what could only have been a staggering additional cost (undisclosed), stocked the park with twenty-four pieces of public sculpture. And not just any sculpture. Now standing on two blocks in downtown St. Louis is more public art by renowned modern and contemporary artists, per square foot, than can be found anywhere I know outside of a museum. This includes work by twentieth-century sculptors such as Léger and Maillol; blue-chip contemporaries such as Martin Puryear and Tony Smith; and younger, lesser-known artists such as Donald Baechler and Julian Opie. The city retains ownership of the land, and the Gateway Foundation is committed to shouldering the costs of security and maintenance.

Citygarden's Warren Byrd and the High Line's James Corner designed landscapes that narrate stories about what places these parks have been and have become, each in their way constructing and laying claim to a distinctive sense of place. Byrd gets points for degree of difficulty: he faced a flat site in a nearly empty downtown. Still, he, along with the Gateway Foundation, can be faulted for trying too hard. Twenty-four sculptures is just too many to stuff into three acres of park, even if most are, by the standards of the genre, comparatively small. (One imagines Kapoor's *Cloud Gate* gobbling up the entire site.) Byrd's design, too, is in places oppressively overdesigned. He does establish a coherent sense of identity with a two-block-long curving limestone wall—cum—



waterfall that creates a needed focal point, and affords spatial and acoustical separation from adjacent Chestnut Street, and offers up a site for group gatherings. This wall steps up to six feet at its highest point, where it frames a large video screen—baseball games and old movies are sometimes shown here. With furniture, topographical variation, and additional water features, Byrd does also carve out enough variety and incident in other parts of the park to afford some of the sculptures the breathing room they need. Citygarden's narrative thread is a tale of the interplay between St. Louis's

history and its topography: the bluffs of the Mississippi River, Native American ceremonial mounds, the flatlands of the Midwestern plains.

In the High Line, Corner and his collaborators wisely let their design be guided by the extraordinary piece of urban infrastructure that is the site: a set of aging elevated train tracks spanning twenty-two blocks in lower Manhattan. Still tied and pinned in place, these tracks run along a simple, handsome path built up from concrete beams laid side by side, ends slanting down to dive into the platform deck. This structure runs the length of the site, reinforcing the park's sense of linear procession while offering up a vocabulary flexible enough to integrate the park's other elements, such as lighting and furniture, into the fabric of the whole.

The elevated railroad that became the High Line opened to commercial rail traffic in 1930 and closed in 1980, made irrelevant by the dominance of commercial trucking. Nature's reclamation of the abandoned tracks into an overgrown tangle of goldenrod, grasses, and artemisia gave Corner and his collaborators a termination point for their story and the starting point for a sustainable design. A quiet, remarkably restrained composition of drought-tolerant perennials, grasses, shrubs, and trees, most native to the region, frame the walkway and enliven the path. Breakout moments in the High Line's linear logic are a glassed-in bank of auditorium-like seating hung off the platform and offering views onto the street below, and multi-tiered decks apportioned with generously sized chaise longue-type benches. Walking along the High Line, one catches frequent glimpses and then full views of the nearby Hudson River—itsself one of Manhattan's greatest monuments, and too often out of sight.

CORNER IS THE leading theorist of a highly influential design movement called Landscape Urbanism, which seeks to reclaim landscape architecture from the preciousness of garden design by marrying it with regional planning and, especially, with urban design. This is a welcome and long overdue development in the profession, for which Corner can claim partial credit. But it is also part of Landscape Urbanism's agenda to eschew coherent aesthetic programs and legible narratives—such things are deemed passé. Corner is given to pronouncements that form is out, networks and systems in; and that today designers should concentrate on creating neutral

forums that can host an ever-changing series of appropriations and “events.” These ideas tend to come packaged in the tiresome, randomly boldfaced discourse of postmodernism, making it all play extremely well in the halls of the academy.

Fortunately, Corner has proved himself a better designer than some of his theories might suggest. He and his High Line collaborators claim that they wished to “save the High Line from architecture.” Lucky for us, they did nothing of the sort. Corner claims Olmstead as one of his heroes, and like Gustafson in Lurie Garden, he has learned Olmstead’s lessons on aesthetic coherence and narrative form in order to construct in design a narrative and an experience that is powerful, simple, and clear—a tale of Manhattan’s industrial past, and of its subsequent deindustrialization, and of Chelsea’s transformation from an oft-skipped local stop, filled mainly with warehouses and meat markets, to an upscale retail and residential district with street life, tourists, and a promising future. Like Lurie Garden, the High Line is superb. Olmstead need no longer be the reference point for the future of the great urban park.

The gentrification of Chelsea was under way long before the High Line, although the park certainly helped to establish as a credible residential neighborhood an area that previously had little open space and no park. Citygarden’s impact on St. Louis has been more extraordinary, although its full extent will not be measurable for years. Downtown St. Louis already had begun to enjoy an economic upsurge before the opening of the park (the figure usually given is that since 2000 there has been \$4 billion in public and private investment), and approximately five thousand residents have moved into the neighborhood. Since Citygarden opened, a major office block adjacent to the site is undergoing renovation for re-rental, the main branch of the public library is also undergoing renovation, and the National Park Service, which owns the famed Gateway Arch, is sponsoring an international competition for a waterfront park.

Even better, whereas before Citygarden the vacant lots between Chestnut and Market Streets functioned as an invisible barrier dividing white, middle-class St. Louis on the south side from African American St. Louis to the north, this land has now become the site where white privilege meets African American disenfranchisement, becoming what the Russian constructivists used to call a social condenser. Visiting Citygarden on a

warm day, where office workers lunch, kids play in fountains while caretakers sip coffee, and people in headphones follow the audio tours of the art, it is difficult to imagine how those responsible for its design could have feared, as one told me she did, that on opening day no one would even venture in.

When politicians, philanthropists, and journalists consider how their work might advance the cause of social justice,

Anthony Julius THE OLD WAY

**HIGH FINANCIER:
THE LIVES AND TIME OF
SIEGMUND WARBURG**

By Niall Ferguson

(The Penguin Press, 548 pp., \$35)

IF ONE OBJECT of reading is to make ourselves at home in the world, or at least to diminish its somewhat minatory strangeness, then we should now be demanding very many books about banks and bankers. And yet there is a certain kind of serious-minded person who would give a ready welcome, say, to another biography of Heidegger, or another study of the Israeli-Palestinian impasse, or another book about the failure of liberalism, but would offer no hospitality to a business biography—indeed, who would pass over, without guilt, a review of such a work, even in a journal otherwise regularly and thoroughly read. To such a reader, for whose attention many books clamor hopelessly, on whom the demands of family and work press more insistently, the prospect of reading a five-hundred-plus-page life of a financier whose influence is no longer felt, and whose achievements have not survived his own passing, must seem very remote indeed.

This is unsurprising, not least because such a book is an instance of a genre itself familiar and widely despised. Airport and railway station bookstores are stuffed full of its latest iterations. Mostly non-books, even anti-books, these banal inspirational and cautionary tales—self-help manuals, secrets of business success revealed, scandals of business failures exposed, and so on—comprise the essentially undifferentiable matter against which proper books, books of real substance, invite definition. Or so it widely seems.

There is at least one work which demands to be excepted from, even gives

they typically do not speak the language of design. This is wrong. The new great urban parks in Chicago, St. Louis, and New York open up new vistas in a project that everyone should embrace: the creation of a cleaner, more livable, more humane, and more just twenty-first-century city. The failure in Boston demonstrates that we cannot leave it to our public officials to create our new public spaces. They need help. ♦

the lie to, this unreflective reproof. Fritz Stern’s *Gold and Iron*, first published in 1977, his great study of the intimate and politically consequential late-nineteenth-century relationship between the statesman Otto von Bismarck and the financier Gerson von Bleichröder, is the business biography for people who do not read business biographies. Its themes—the foundation of the modern German state; the role of Jews in modernity; the connections between politics and finance, power and money; the struggle between democracy and authoritarianism, nationalism and imperialism—have an appeal far greater than the typical “life and business times” accounts of miscellaneous entrepreneurs and moneymen.

Niall Ferguson’s life of Siegmund Warburg invites comparison with Stern’s magnificent book. No, it is not a masterpiece; it lacks the full historical and intellectual resonance of Stern’s volume. But it is a work of great assurance and distinction. It should not be made a casualty of a commonplace philistinism. Banks matter—and therefore bankers matter, too.

SIEGMUND WARBURG was born in 1902 into the Hamburg banking family whose surname he carried. It was a name that intimidated of its holders both considerable financial acumen and a certain cultural sophistication. By his twenties, Siegmund had already proven possession of each, in full measure. When it became clear to him (earlier than to most) that Hitler’s Third Reich was going to become utterly intolerant of—and therefore utterly intolerable to—Jews, he left for England, where he thereafter

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made his home. By the time war broke out he was already a naturalized British citizen, and became comfortable writing to German colleagues of Germany as “your country.” His postwar success as the founder of the firm S. G. Warburg & Company was immense, principally because of his willingness to practice a kind of banking then unknown to British banks, which reflected his indifference to established “City” ways of doing business. He died in 1982, and is now little remembered, his bank having been swallowed up by larger institutions. His style of banking has been cast aside.

There are parallels between the subjects of the Stern biography and the Ferguson biography, though Warburg was no admirer of Bismarck. “The formation of the Bismarck Reich,” he wrote, “brought out the worst qualities of the Germans.” Still, like Bleichröder, Warburg was a German-Jewish financier, and even though most of his business life was spent in Britain, he remained to the end, according to Ferguson, an “uprooted German.” “I brought something to England which was a little bit different because I was a damn foreigner, a German Jew,” he once explained. Ferguson portrays him as a nineteenth-century German trapped in twentieth-century England. But it was decisive for both men that they were, and remained, Jews.

Like Bleichröder, Warburg played a part in the modernization of the financial center where he made his home. He, too, formed relationships with powerful politicians. He, too, understood political and economic issues to be inseparable, and analyzed them skillfully and often to considerable advantage. And he, too, ended his life with rewards and recognition. But Warburg retained a suspicion of the social elite of which he was both a member and an outsider. He was engaged in promoting the interests of Jewish communities, his own and others elsewhere in Europe. He was exposed to anti-Semitic prejudice. And although a person of immense accomplishment, he left nothing of any substance: there is no longer an independent S. G. Warburg & Co., just as Bleichröder’s bank was but a shadow of its former self within a few decades of the great financier’s death.

Warburg, like Bleichröder, adopted business practices that were eschewed by a later generation, to its detriment. The financial crisis through which we are still living was in large measure caused, in Ferguson’s view, by a genera-

tion of bankers who deliberately abandoned Warburg’s ideal, which preferred the client relationship over the speculative transaction and the secured loan, generating income through fees for advice, rather than a participant’s profits on deals, or the interest charged on lending.

IN CERTAIN RESPECTS, then, Warburg’s career was the equivalent of Bleichröder’s, though transacted in a minor key. Personally, however, the two men could hardly have been more different. Bleichröder shared neither the extreme bookishness nor the intellectual snobbery that were such distinctive features of Warburg’s character. Bleichröder was a household name to his contemporaries; Warburg’s name was well known only in financial and political circles. Though he was a “key insider in 1960s politics” (Ferguson’s words), he held no government office or appointment.

As with politics, so with philanthropy. Bleichröder labored for ten years to orchestrate the influence of Western European Jewry on behalf of Romanian Jewry. His immense objective was to persuade the great powers to compel Romania to grant civic equality to its Jews. He failed, of course—but what an undertaking! Warburg, by contrast, confined himself to generous individual acts of philanthropy. He maintained a cool distance from the new state of Israel. Troubled—in 1942, of all moments—by the fear that Jews were becoming infected by “that worst modern epidemic of folly called nationalism,” Warburg reconciled himself to Jewish nationalism only following Israel’s foundation, and for a short while was ready to celebrate “that brave, young State of Israel.”

As for the question of anti-Semitism, it was for Bleichröder, Stern explains, a demoralizing constant in his life, “mean-

and omnipresent.” He was the repeated victim of extortion and blackmail attempts: the anti-Semitic press in his day was relentless. He had the misfortune, a friend consoled him, to collide with the worst rabble of the world. Public innuendos polluted Bleichröder’s life to the end. He suffered in full measure, Stern concludes, the anguish of assimilation: a life with immense honors and many rewards, but lived in constant need of the state’s protection, and without any settled sense of acceptance or security. The problem of reconciling Jewish ancestry with a passion for assimilation dominated and ruined the lives of whole generations of German Jews.

But Warburg suffered no such horrors. Once extruded from Nazi Germany, he lived his life largely free of the constraints of anti-Semitic hatred—though he attracted, inevitably, the prejudiced attention of Bank of England officials. “He has established himself,” one of them wrote,

... as a leading Jewish financier of international standing ... he is an international Jew to whom no bounds of country or circumstance are known. He employs Jews in his many operations which have often been askance to the Authorities. He employs people of brains and Jewish acumen ... and has climbed high on their shoulders. He can be ruthless with his employees but never falls foul of those of his own persuasion who have helped him ... to obtain his present position.

Such prejudices, Ferguson observes, were “remarkably” widespread in the British establishment of the postwar era. In the City’s “most incorrigibly snobbish enclaves,” Ferguson adds, Warburg and his employees were known simply as “those shits.” In the 1970s, the Arab boycott hit Warburg’s bank especially hard. Warburg’s response was characteristically tough: “I would ring up my friends in the important European banks and say, ‘I hear you seem to be giving in to this blackmail of the Arabs. I think that is very unfair to us and it’s wrong in itself. Shall I interpret that as meaning you sympathize with anti-Semitism?’”

Stern’s embrace enfolds a whole nation, an entire period. Bleichröder, he concludes, was a part of the great transformation of German society; his life—his successes and his sufferings—mirrored the dynamism and the flawed character of that society. The multiplicity

Hammer Is the Prayer

There is no consolation in the thought of God,
he said, slamming another nail

in another house another havoc had half-taken.
Grace is not consciousness, nor is it beyond.

To hell with remembrance, to hell with heaven,
hammer is the prayer of the poor and the dying.

And as wind in some lordless random comes to rest,
and all the disquieted dust within,

peace came to the hinterlands of our minds,
too remote to know, but peace nonetheless.

CHRISTIAN WIMAN

of his public roles made him a leading figure of his time, while his private life was dominated by his confused struggle with a society that was both hostile and enticing. He was both master and slave in his society. These are the lessons in his life, far greater than his influence and fortune ever were. Ferguson attempts a similar expansiveness, quoting with approval the view of George Steiner, who conducted a series of interviews with his subject: "Warburg's background and career enact one of the crucial chapters—at once brilliant and profoundly tragic—in the history of the Diaspora, and of German Jewry in particular."

More specifically, through the study of Warburg's life, Ferguson believes answers can be given to certain critical questions concerning postwar British financial history. Why was it that bankers of Jewish origin played a leading role in British financial history? Did the gentlemanly capitalism of the City of London undermine the performance of the British economy, and accelerate Britain's decline as a manufacturing power? Did the City assist in undermining the ambitions of the Labour Party to modernize the British economy in the 1960s? Why did financial deregulation end up benefiting foreign banks more than British banks in the period following Warburg's death?

To these questions, Ferguson only hints at answers—a frustrating deficiency in what is otherwise a very thoroughly argued book. I infer his answers to be (in the order in which he poses them): the prominence of Jewish bankers in Britain was owed in part to the exodus of Jews from Hitler's Germany, and in part to the City's anti-Semitism, which kept Jews at a distance and thereby equipped them to respond more imaginatively to new financial demands and opportunities. The gentlemanly capitalism of the City of London did indeed undermine the performance of the British economy, and the City did indeed assist in undermining the ambitions of the Labour Party to modernize the British economy in the 1960s. And British banks were too small to compete on equal terms with their foreign rivals, and so they lost.

SIEGMUND WARBURG may not have been famous, but he was important. This importance has three aspects. First, he was representative of a certain estimable type, both in his prejudices and his perspectives, and in the trajectory taken by his career. Second, he was a privileged witness to certain important individuals, and to certain his-

toric events and processes. And third, he was a person whose achievements had an impact on his society, on his times.

Warburg had many estimable qualities—and, of course, a ration of less estimable ones, such as workaholicism, obsessive perfectionism, and a certain fickleness and occasional brutality toward employees. But he had an admirable capacity for admiring others. He also was a man of good judgment, possessing an "unrivalled prescience," as well as the equally useful ability to accept the good judgment of others. He was the very model of the cultivated banker: he would seldom go on business trips with fewer than three books in his attaché case. Freud and Nietzsche made religion impossible for him. In Steiner's admiring assessment, Warburg had a nose for vulgarity and was "wonderfully ascetic." He had "an integrity so absolute that the merest hint of slipperiness or sleaze left him utterly disgusted."

He did not die an especially wealthy man. "Throughout his life," concludes Ferguson, "Siegfried Warburg had other motives than the profit motive." In conformity with the then-fashionable depreciation of family, it was his firm view that "the desirable relationships are what Goethe called *Wahlverwandschaften*, that is, selected relationships in contradiction to blood relationships." This was a view that explained his tendency—from which his wife had often to protect him—to fall in love, unguardedly and impetuously, with many of the people he met. While unconditional fatherly love toward his own children, notes Ferguson, was not Warburg's "strong suit," following his death many of his colleagues and business associates paid tribute to the "fatherly" role he had played in their own lives.

His life, too, had something of the character of a model, or an ideal type—the kind of Central European figure, almost always a man, who managed to survive world wars and migrations, all the while moving forward and maintaining certain standards and a certain level of personal cultivation. This sense of fixity, of an unwillingness to bend, is intimated in Henry Kissinger's observation that Warburg "was an easy person to get along with if you just said 'yes.'" Ferguson drives hard the theme of representativeness in Warburg's life, even in its earliest years. He believes that Weimar's larger generational conflict played itself out in microcosm in the Warburg generational conflict over control of the family busi-

ness. Or consider Warburg's own stance during World War I: he was, in conformity with his schoolmates, an intense German patriot, holding Ludendorff and von Hindenburg to be splendid and heroic fellows, admirable in every way.

Again, Warburg, as with many other German Jews in the earliest years of Hitler's rule, at first underestimated the Nazi threat ("it was incomprehensible to me that he would have such a following"), and again, as with many other German Jews in the years that followed, he was at first unimpressed with, but thereafter passionately admiring of, Britain and the irenic habits of its political classes (though he was among the City's most outspoken opponents of appeasement). As for his views on Americans, in the pre-war years at least, they reflected the commonplaces of an entire continent. The American branch of his family and their circle, he wrote before the war, were "so boring, vacuous in both spiritual and human terms and suffocating in money." There has seldom been, he added, "as big a collection of mediocre hearts and minds, or as big an oversupply of philistines as there is among the present younger generation in America." They were primitives who had "jumped straight from trees into motorcars"; their stock market was like "Monte Carlo without the fun of it."

One can overstate this representativeness, of course. Unlike many of his schoolfellows, Warburg's political leanings were slightly to the left. And in his business life in London, he cultivated relations with a broader range of political friends than might perhaps be expected of a banker. Following the landslide victory of the Labour Party in 1945, Warburg wrote to a family member: "Most people in the City are frightened of the new Labour Government, and it gives me particular pleasure to shock them by telling them the new government will probably bring a lot of fresh air into many frustrated channels." The pleasure that he took in posing as the solitary socialist in the City, the "red financier," lasted until the end of his life.

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WHAT, THEN, of Warburg the privileged witness? Here is an account he gave to a correspondent of his first meeting with Keynes:

It was after 11 a.m. and he received me in red slippers—for a conventional German this caused me much surprise. I had heard that he was a very great



man but I did not like him at all at our first meeting. There was something effeminate, something “schnoddrig” [irreverent] about him. He dealt with serious matters in what seemed to me a facetious way. . . . [He] personified for me a rather typically English combination of intellectual cynicism and . . . [the] highest standards in evaluating human thoughts and actions. Keynes could be almost sadistic in demolishing the arguments of people, however well-meaning they might be, if he could detect the slightest flaw in their thought processes.

This is acute enough, if unsympathetic. He wrote rather more enthusiastically of Israel's first leaders:

When I think of the many admirable things I have noticed in Israel, the most admirable one is that the leaders of a people who are . . . in a state of war and faced with such immense problems, can maintain a completely relaxed and peaceful spirit.

But Begin he found chauvinistic, the personification of “militant territorial expansionism.” Sadat was quite another proposition:

I was particularly struck by what I would call a very significant Jewish rhythm in expressing his views and in showing his reactions both by words and physical movements. I found him definitely “sympathisch” as a human being while from an intellectual angle I observed in him a strange combination of directness and shrewdness on the one hand and a lack of sense for nuances on the other hand.

All this is of some historical interest, but it would be hard to credit Warburg with any special insight into the minds of the many extraordinary people he encountered.

It is to one particular failure, rather than to any of his achievements, that Ferguson points when assessing Warburg's contemporary significance. In his view, Warburg represents the road not taken, or perhaps more precisely, the road abandoned. Warburg proved unable to construct an institution strong enough to sustain in his absence the values that he imposed on it in his lifetime. These were the values associated with his ideal of *haute banque*: a high-quality financial consultancy troubleshooting for corporate clients, or “highly qualified mediational activity,” in Warburg's phrase. It

was by the application of this business model—which made possible, among other good things, the first-ever hostile takeover in British financial history—that Warburg more than anyone else, writes Ferguson, was able to save the City.

The City of London, the world's pre-eminent international financial center, had been economically stagnant, and Warburg revived it. It is now morally deficient, and with any luck Warburgian

standards may revive it again. It once was timid and un-entrepreneurial (capitalists are rarely adventuresome); it is now reckless and imprisoned in the perspective of the short-term (capitalists are rarely farsighted). Warburg, Ferguson concludes, had the energy and the imagination to address both vices, though he lived long enough only to address the former kind. From where, then, will the new Warburg come to save today's banks? ♦

David Thomson CHINAMEN

**CHARLIE CHAN:
THE UNTOLD STORY OF
THE HONORABLE DETECTIVE
AND HIS RENDEZVOUS WITH
AMERICAN HISTORY**

By Yunte Huang
(W. W. Norton, 354 pp., \$26.95)

EVEN IN OUR fading half-life of cultural memory, the notion may endure that 1925 was a good moment for American literature. In that year, we were given Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Anita Loos's *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, and Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*. Hemingway was writing *The Sun Also Rises*. But 1925 was even better than that, for it was in that year that Earl Derr Biggers published *The House Without a Key*, the novel that introduced the reading public to Charlie Chan: “His cheeks were as chubby as a baby's, his skin ivory tinted, his black hair close-cropped, his amber eyes slanting.” In short, a Chinaman as perceived by an alarmed Caucasian. His first words are pure pidgin (if that is possible): “No knife are present in neighborhood of crime.”

It was the start of a franchise, and a building block in our condescending xenophobia. It was also the launching point of one of the most entertaining, informative, and provocative books I have read in a long time—an inspired and witty travel book, so long as you see cultural history as a place for travel. *Charlie Chan*, the title announces, and that is its linchpin, I suppose; but this is a cheerfully digressive book in which Yunte Huang tells us much also about Hawaii, the history of immigration and prejudice, the Chinese in America, the movie business, and the charm that has always made a lot of questionable characters

and themes click in popular fiction—not to mention the stew of reality and mythology that lurks beneath the verdict, “Forget it, Jake. It's Chinatown,” the last words of a classic American movie made by a famously uneasy Pole.

EARL DERR BIGGERS was born in Warren, Ohio, in 1884. A Harvard graduate with delicate health, he got a job as a crime reporter at the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, but he was fired because of his inclination to turn fact into fiction. At the *Boston Traveler* that habit was indulged, until he was fired again. So he wrote a novel, *Seven Keys to Baldpate*, published in 1913, and enough of a success to permit marriage. Thereupon he was taken up by the *Saturday Evening Post* as a short-story writer, and he also plunged into the theater, doing his own plays and doctoring those by others. But he was so furiously busy that he had a breakdown and took himself to Hawaii to recover.

It was 1920, and Hawaii seemed like paradise. Mark Twain, who had visited, called it “the loveliest fleet of islands that lies anchored in any ocean.” For survival the islands depended on sandalwood and sugar cane, the latter of which required an ample supply of cheap labor. And thus the Hawaiian authorities—it had been a kingdom with kings until the American takeover in 1898—called for workers from China. Twain (another journalist drawn to fiction) saw the hiring of “coolies” this way: “Some of them were cripples, some were lunatics, some afflicted with incurable diseases, and nearly all were intractable, full

David Thomson is the author of THE NEW BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF FILM: UPDATED AND EXPANDED (Knopf). A fifth edition will be published by Knopf in October.

of fight, and animated by the spirit of the very devil. However, the planters managed to tone them down and now they like them very well. Their former trade of cutting throats on the China seas has made them uncommonly handy at cutting cane. They are steady, industrious workers when properly watched."

Who would doubt Mark Twain—or miss the natural assurance of racism? In the second half of the nineteenth century, according to Yunte Huang, more than 46,000 Chinese laborers came to Hawaii and flourished—no matter that on the American mainland the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 had curtailed immigration, inspired by feelings of resentment among white workers and the overall assumption of Chinese threat embodied in Bret Harte's poem "The Heathen Chinese." The number of Chinese in the United States, much increased by the Gold Rush and the building of the transcontinental railroad, fell by nearly half everywhere but in Hawaii in the early years of the twentieth century.

In popular culture, nothing expressed this paranoia better than the character of Fu Manchu, launched by Sax Rohmer (whose real name was Arthur Henry Ward, from Birmingham and south London) in 1913 in his novel, *The Insidious Dr Fu-Manchu: Being a Somewhat Detailed Account of the Amazing Adventures of Nayland Smith in His Trailing of the Sinister Chinaman*. Fu Manchu is "a superman with a satanic heart," according to Yunte Huang. As Rohmer introduces his character, the incense of melodrama hangs in the air: "Imagine a person, tall, lean and feline, high-shouldered, with a brow like Shakespeare and a face like Satan, a close-shaven skull, and long, magnetic eyes of the true cat-green. Invest him with all the cruel cunning of an entire Eastern race, accumulated in one giant intellect, with all the resources of science past and present, with all the resources, if you will, of a wealthy government."

Invest away. The Fu Manchu novel was a big hit, reprinted twenty times and doing a great deal to bolster the bad reputation of that part of east London known as "Limehouse"—"a vista of dark streets, shadowy yellow-faced forms, the brief flash of a knife blade, a scream in the night, a bloated corpse fished up from the murky waters of the Thames." The book is one part Dickens, one part silent cinema, and one part widespread dread of the "Chink." I use that nasty word because D. W. Griffith's film of 1919, *Broken Blossoms*, comes from a story, "The Chink and the Child," by

Thomas Burke and uses that dismissive name. Lillian Gish, brutalized by a drunken father, finds sympathy and love from a Chinese man living in Limehouse. I daresay Griffith felt he was offering a sentimental rescue of the Chinese in this film, yet there are so many automatic assumptions made by the movie that we may be reminded of how, a few years earlier, Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* and its use of blackface rascals had done so much to resuscitate the dormant Ku Klux Klan. Moreover, the Chinese man in *Broken Blossoms* could not be played by a Chinese actor—it is Richard Barthelmess (a handsome romantic lead actor), with slanted eyes, a lot of makeup, and the overall instruction to be aloof, still, and inscrutable.

THIS WAS THE cultural climate in which Earl Derr Biggers came to Hawaii in 1920. He took a cottage in Waikiki and sat there staring at the ocean and dreaming. He began to write: "The shadows cast by the tall cocoanut palms lengthened and deepened, the light of the falling sun flamed on Diamond Head and tinted with gold the rollers sweeping in from the coral reef. A few late swimmers, reluctant to depart, dotted those waters whose touch is like the caress of a lover. On the springboard of the nearest float a slim brown girl poised for one delectable instant. What a figure!... Like an arrow the slender figure rose, then fell; the perfect dive, silent and clean."

It is a thriller done in tourist brochure prose. Biggers could write that stuff as easily as spreading butter on hot toast, but he also had real ingenuity. Those sentences are the opening of *The House Without a Key*, and its vision of a murder committed by someone who dives off a ship, comes to shore, does the foul deed, and then swims back to the ship—a murderer vanished in the night. Biggers may not have known where he was going, but as the mystery unfolds he summons up a detective, a Chinese operator living in Honolulu, to solve the case. Very quickly, the mystery yields to the enchantment of the detective. He is plump, slow, a little lazy, a man with many children and this unforgettable way of talking: "Big head is only a good place for a very large headache"; "Favorite pastime of man is fooling himself"; "Door of opportunity swing both ways"; "Optimist only sees doughnut, pessimist sees hole"—and so on. It is a shameless but amusing conglomeration of "Confucius say" and fortune cookie wisdom, and it is a way people talk only in movies—or talking pictures. More specifically, it is

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Charlie Chan, who from the outset was as adorable as Fu Manchu was alarming. He is as far-fetched yet as viable as Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot (who was introduced in 1920).

Yunte Huang's amiable ramble of a book plays with the idea that Chan was based on a real person—Chang Apana, sent from China to live with an uncle on the Hawaiian islands as a child and raised there, a cowboy first and then a policeman with a high reputation for integrity and blunt force. He was a small, wiry man, tough-looking and tough in action—he was famous for his use of a bullwhip—but seldom given to Chan's orotund aphorisms. There is no doubt that Biggers had heard of Apana, and it is plain that once Charlie Chan was a hit, and on screen, Apana took advantage of the resemblance and traded on it. Yet Huang is a diligent-enough researcher to note that the closest claimed links do not really fit. Biggers made it all up, and he had the unthinking good nature to make Chan appealing and almost cuddly. *The House Without a Key* was published in 1925 by Bobbs-Merrill, and it seems to have sold sixteen thousand copies in hardback. It was filmed the very next year, with George Kuwa in the lead role, but a silent picture. Biggers's timing was acute, or lucky—smart man act as if luck his pet dog. In another year there would be sound to let those aphorisms roll, and the Fox Film Company eager to make pictures.

BIGGERS JUMPED ON his own bandwagon. He published *The Chinese Parrot* in 1926, *Behind That Curtain* in 1928, *The Black Camel* in 1929, and *Charlie Chan Carries On* in 1930. There would be six Chan books in all, selling in mounting numbers, before Biggers died of a heart attack in 1933. But not before he had seen—and approved of—Warner Oland as Charlie. It seems likely that Biggers had personally recommended Oland for the part—not that he had any hand, except taking money, in the making of “his” films. People at Fox had told the author that Oland was “a ham” and not worth hiring. But this was a great age for hams, and it is hardly possible to play Charlie Chan by any other method.

No, “Warner Oland” does not sound Chinese, though it may be closer to Chinese than “Johan Verner Ölund,” the actor's given name when he was born in Bjurholm, Sweden, in 1879. Oland was versatile, to say the least. He had been making pictures in America since 1915, and his most notable part previ-

ously had been as the father, the Jewish cantor, in *The Jazz Singer*, the first real talking picture and the movie that had Al Jolson as the son who prefers jazz singing to singing in the synagogue. He had also played the lead in *The Mysterious Dr. Fu Manchu* in 1929, thus demonstrating his capacity to deliver the stereotypical Oriental villain.

But fate has an odd way of working out: as Charlie says, “Truth, like football, receive many kicks before reaching goal.” The knockout Fu Manchu film did not come along until 1932, as *The Mask of Fu Manchu*, with Boris Karloff playing the Doctor (and Karloff, though born in England, is said to have had Indian blood) and Myrna Loy (from Helena, Montana) as his wicked, slinky daughter Fah Lo See—father and child seem to know each other very well. Meanwhile, Oland had brought Chan to the screen. He would be paid so well for the role that it seems to have accelerated his alcoholism as well as his tendency to mania, but he was phlegmatic about the part. To be ready, he simply let his moustache droop and raised his eyebrows. Beyond that he seems to have taken a drink or two to make Charlie's speech more silky and sluggish. After that, he went with the God-given material.

THE CHARLIE CHAN franchise was larger than most people would guess: forty-seven pictures between 1931 and 1947. They were B movies, if you like, seldom costing more than \$250,000 apiece. (Oland got \$30,000 per picture.) But they were A movies in that they usually made \$1 million in profit. Audiences loved them—not least in China, which was in the habit of banning American movies that portrayed the Chinese badly. (Von Sternberg's *Shanghai Express*, in which Oland plays a corrupt businessman who exploits Anna May Wong, and *The Good Earth* were not allowed into the country that they depicted.) Yunte Huang suggests that at Fox only Shirley Temple was a more reliable money-maker. It seems a great shame that she and Charlie were never given a run together.

That could have happened. After Biggers's death, his widow made a deal by which Fox bought the rights to the character—alas, Huang does not supply the details of the package, but clearly the movies made everyone rich. (One spin-off from Charlie's impact was Mr. Moto, a Japanese detective played by Peter Lorre in a series launched in 1937, again by Twentieth Century Fox.) Oland could not stand the success. All his bad hab-

its mounted and he was dead in 1938. Thereafter the role was assigned to other actors—Sidney Toler (1938–1946, twenty-two films, taking Chan to Reno, Panama, New York, Rio, and all over, as if they were road pictures) and then Roland Winters (1947–1949). Connoisseurs prefer Oland in the part, if only because his impassive features seem to understand the deadpan humor and the family-man kindness in Charlie Chan. If the film version of Hercule Poirot was one of Chan's descendants, so too was Peter Falk's Columbo—a detective all the more deadly to the criminal class because he seems half-asleep or simply eccentric.

YUNTE HUANG is not just fond of Charlie. He is appreciative of the way the character dispels some of the darker myths in the way we regard the Chinese, but his rich and very wide-ranging book is far from settled or complacent. Huang knows that the stereotyping goes on, no matter that the Chinese population in America is now substantial, and despite the way we have come to appreciate mixed-birth stories out of Hawaii.

But old habits die hard, and as Charlie warns, “He who rides on tiger cannot dismount.” *Chinatown* is a model of sophistication next to the Chan pictures—but even at its late date, it cheerfully goes along with the idea that Chinatown in Los Angeles is a world with rules of its own, an assignment that can drive an honest cop crazy, an empire in which the corruption of cops and Chinese go hand in hand. Is that really so, or is it one more sign of our reflexive Fu Manchuism? If you recall the film, one of its best jokes has the punch line “Screwing like a Chinaman.” It always gets a laugh, but do the Chinese have sex in ways unknown to the rest of us?

The history of Chinese roles is very odd. Why should Scandinavians have had a corner on the work? In 1933, in Frank Capra's *The Bitter Tea of General Yen*, the Chinese warlord who loves Barbara Stanwyck's missionary was played by Nils Asther, and played very well. In *The Good Earth*, the Chinese peasants were Luise Rainer (born in Germany) and Paul Muni (from Austria and the Yiddish theater). When Elia Kazan made *East of Eden*, he cut the Chinese servant Lee, who may be the person in the book most loved by readers: was it to concentrate on James Dean and his story, or was it because no one in Hollywood liked the prospect of a leading Chinese character in a big picture? A few

years later, in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (that sweet film, so tricky with Capote's original, with "Moon River" running through it like molasses), Mickey Rooney played a Japanese character in ways that drew formal protest. And Yunte Huang also points out—gently but firmly—that *The Manchurian Candidate*, which can seem a very grown-up film, is not only based on the old idea of the Chinese as evil and hypnotic masterminds, but is actually derived from another Sax Rohmer novel, *President Fu Manchu*, in which the Doctor gets into the White House.

There are, of course, some exceptions. The early films of Wayne Wang—*Chan Is Missing*, *Dim Sum: A Little Bit of Heart*, and *Eat a Bowl of Tea*—were decent, subtle portraits of Chinese in San Francisco. There is a deft portrait of an insolently polite opportunist who is Chinese in William Wyler's *The Letter*—a role taken by Victor Sen Yung, who was often Charlie Chan's Number Two Son, though the same film has Gale Sondergaard, unforgettable as an exotic Chinese mistress who demands vengeance. And so much more, all the way to frequent depictions of modern-day China poised like a tiger ready to devour and vomit up all of America's innocent debt. As Charlie says, "Slippery man sometimes slip in own oil." You can almost hear Oland's delicious lisping over "slippery."

Yunte Huang tells these stories and many more in his capacious laundry bag of a book. Wait: what made me think of laundry? So let me add one detail that he does not mention. It comes from cricket—but the ignorant can understand it, I hope. A left-arm bowler's natural delivery moves from left to right (off the ground) as a right-handed batsman faces the ball. But in the 1930s there was a left-arm bowler named Ellis Achong, born in Trinidad but of Chinese ancestry. He played in a few test matches for the West Indies, and he invented a delivery that turned the other way (from right to left). Well, in 1933 that surprise bowled out a famous English batsman who walked off the field in dudgeon saying, "Fancy being bowled by a Chinaman!" That name for devious trickery stuck, and this kind of delivery (it is technically a left-armed's googly, but never mind about that) became known as "a Chinaman." It took the Australian cricketers to improve on the name, and to catch the larger sense of the Chinese as bad news: they called the Chinaman "a wrong 'un." But that only leads us to the vexed matter of the Australians! Or should we follow Charlie Chan's advice—"Smart fly keep out of gravity"? ♦

Peter Green

THE STRANGER FROM WITHIN

**WILLIAM GOLDING:
THE MAN WHO WROTE
LORD OF THE FLIES**

By John Carey

(Free Press, 573 pp., \$32.50)

THE PUBLISHING history of *Lord of the Flies* reads like a fairy tale. In 1953, more than half a century ago, a grubby, dog-eared manuscript that had made the rounds (and of which only the first twenty or so pages had received serious attention) arrived at the office of Faber & Faber, the most distinguished literary publisher in London. It was turned over to the professional reader, one Polly Perkins, who initially vetted the flow of fiction submissions not only for Faber but also for other publishers, as well as for a leading literary agency. Her brief report, in green ink on the covering letter, was witheringly dismissive: "Time: the Future. Absurd & uninteresting fantasy about the explosion of an atom bomb on the Colonies. A group of children who land in jungle-country near New Guinea. Rubbish & dull. Pointless." Not only she, but, more to the point, Faber's sales director W. J. Crawley, whose verdict was regarded as infallible, pronounced the submission, then titled *Strangers from Within*, as quite unpublishable.

At this point the dog-eared manuscript would have been dispatched on its travels again had it not been for a new editorial recruit to the firm named Charles Monteith, who saw its superficial flaws but, as he read on, was increasingly gripped by its fearfully vivid narrative, moral intensity, and merciless verdict on mankind. Against the reluctance of his seniors, young Monteith stubbornly, and heroically, persisted: it was lucky for him that the author, an unknown provincial schoolmaster named William Golding, proved editorially cooperative. Grudgingly, the book—revised, re-titled as *Lord of the Flies*, and furnished with a minimal advance of £60—was accepted by Faber's Book Committee for publication.

No one supposed it would get anywhere. It was even regarded as over-strong meat for Faber's literary adviser,

T. S. Eliot, and so not shown to him—a revealing mistake. Told, at his club, that "Faber had published an unpleasant novel about small boys behaving unspeakably on a desert island," Eliot at once, in some alarm, got hold of a copy, read it, and—as John Carey reports in his new life of Golding—"told Monteith next day that he had found it not only a splendid novel but morally and theologically impeccable." Eliot, the High Anglican Christian of *Four Quartets*, had at once understood, and appreciated, what had repelled his more rational and socially meliorist colleagues.

Indeed, even Monteith (himself as rational a humanist, lawyer, and fellow of All Souls as one could hope to meet) gagged on a basic element in the text that he first read: the concept of one of the boys, Simon, as an unmistakable Christ figure, moving in a quasi-miraculous aura of sanctity. This was something quite different from the other editorial suggestions—mostly structural—that he offered, and that Golding cheerfully accepted. The miraculous, Monteith told his author, had to be "made ambivalent, eliminated, or 'toned down' in such a way as to make Simon explicable in purely rational terms." Here Golding, though anxious to please, tried to hold out for at least some sort of theophany. Monteith was having none of it. The imaginative foundation may have been a theophany, but that was "to be concealed and built on." Simon should be simply presented as "in some ways odd, different, withdrawn." At this point Golding, with the prospect of publication at long last within his grasp, gave in, and removed Simon's more obvious aura. A pattern had been set. For the next forty years Golding, who never left Faber, strove for the miraculous, and Monteith, his lifelong editor, tried to head him off at the pass with words of reason.

THERE IS A VAGUE general belief—the natural climax to a magical success story—that *Lord of the Flies*, published in September 1954, instantly turned everything around for Golding, critically and financially. This is far from true. The British reviews were indeed largely enthusiastic, but critical praise notwithstanding, sales remained comparatively modest (4,662 copies by the end of the first year), and initial efforts

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to market *Lord of the Flies* (and its immediate successors) in the United States ran into almost as many initial rejections as the manuscript had suffered in England. It was unlikely to sell, the refusals ran; it had no chance commercially, it just would not get off the ground: this of a book that was ultimately to generate at least twenty million copies in the English language alone.

So Golding and his family remained strapped for money. Schoolmastering was now augmented by time-consuming literary journalism, but no real immediate breakthrough seemed in sight, even when, finally, Coward-McCann brought out *Lord of the Flies* in America. Confirming pessimistic predictions, its initial print run of five thousand sold only 2,383 copies, and Coward-McCann flatly rejected Golding's second novel, *The Inheritors*. Harcourt, Brace took an option on his third, *Pincher Martin*, claiming that *The Inheritors* would get only "ivory-tower appreciation," and offering to publish the latter only if and when any Golding book topped sales of 7,500. The offer was reluctantly accepted. Harcourt, Brace not only refused to bring out *The Inheritors*, it would not let anyone else do so either. Carey understandably describes this American record as "conservative and provincial," though a more accurate summation might be "unswervingly profit-conscious." The irony, of course, lies in the complete blindness of the bottomliners to the golden egg they held in their hands. To make things worse, Golding's fourth novel, the difficult and much-revised *Free Fall*, received such dismissive reviews that it took him at least four years to regain his creative confidence.

It was not until 1961–1962, more than seven years after that first publication, when he spent the academic year as writer-in-residence at Hollins College in Virginia and also undertook a backbreaking lecture tour at colleges all across America, that the sales of *Lord of the Flies* really took off. Seldom can campus buzz have been more effective. A paperback had come out in 1959: it sold 4,300 that year, 15,000 in 1960, 75,000 in 1961, and an estimated half million by the end of 1962, after which the plates wore out and had to be replaced. At this point Golding, having turned fifty, resigned his teaching post, to his own huge relief, and became a full-time writer. Then, in 1963, Peter Brook's brilliant film version of *Lord of the Flies*, dark and terrifying, premiered at Cannes. Though, as Carey says, the movie "introduced Golding's fable to thousands who never had and never

would read him," it surely also added to the staggering (and never-ending) best-sellerdom that sent sales of *Lord of the Flies* into the literary stratosphere.

In high schools and on campuses nationwide, this unnerving fable of adolescent (and pre-adolescent) reversion to uninhibited savagery on an uninhabited Pacific island proceeded, as the Cold War got hotter, to oust *The Catcher in the Rye* as the new bible of the American teenager and college student. Self-pitying egotism was out; original sin—together with the mysticism that so bothered Charles Monteith—made a spectacular comeback. Educators took note: *Lord of the Flies* became, and remained, as Carey rightly reminds us, a standard item in literary survey courses and national examinations. When, in 1983, Golding went to Stockholm to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, King Carl XVI Gustaf greeted him, shook hands, and said: "It is a great pleasure to meet you, Mr. Golding. I had to do *Lord of the Flies* at school." Though no longer a schoolmaster, Golding found himself still involved, willy-nilly, in shaping the education of the young, and on a wider stage than he had ever known.

His first novel finally made him wealthy beyond his wildest dreams, but always with a sense of unreality. When he spent his royalties, mostly on travel and entertainment, he would often (as I well remember) refer to such income, dismissively, as Monopoly money, and disparage the work that generated it as "boring and crude." To thus belittle what was, in effect, a lifelong trust fund might seem to smack of ingratitude; but from Golding's point of view, the goose that had laid him so unexpected a golden egg was to prove in the long term an unwelcome albatross, casting its malign shadow over all his later fiction. He was to write better novels—most notably *The Inheritors* and *The Spire*—but it was as "the man who wrote *Lord of the Flies*" that he would be remembered, not least during the inevitable slump in reputation that overtook him after his death. Carey chose his subtitle precisely in the hope that readers would discover how much more there was to Golding than his money-making incubus, and in this aim, to an unexpected degree, he has succeeded.

HOW WAS THE magic worked? What kind of man could have produced so potent and hugely influential a parable as *Lord of the Flies*? Carey's biography assembles the facts with thorough research and sympathetic insight, and makes a number of shrewd

psychological guesses, but in the end he leaves this, the great enigma of Golding's life, still hanging in the air. The mystery is only deepened by the fact—apparent to all who knew him well—that Bill Golding simply did not give the impression of being the kind of fellow one might have deduced from a study of his books: a sage preoccupied with the Fall of Man, the problem of evil, the ramifications of original sin. Bluff, bearded, stocky, cheerful, a great social drinker, a dedicated small-boat sailor, he struck many (wrongly, in my opinion) as the epitome, almost the parody, of a hearty ex-naval officer. At their first meeting, when Golding was over seventy, Carey "could not believe that this was the man who had written the novels." Monteith similarly, years earlier, had expected to meet an ascetic young clergyman, and was duly taken aback by his author's tweediness. But on learning that Golding was a schoolmaster, he reflected sensibly that "only a schoolmaster could know, so intimately, how awful boys could be."

Begin at the beginning, then. Golding's father Alec, who, as Carey emphasizes, "influenced him more strongly than any other human being," and is the model for Nick Shales in *Free Fall*, was a science teacher. He admired H. G. Wells, reckoned Darwin's theory of evolution "one of the most sublime conceptions of the human mind," was a devotee of great music and literature, a teetotaler, uncomfortable with sex and rowdiness, a socialist, an atheist, a pacifist, an egalitarian on women's rights. His wife Mildred, six years older than him, was also a musician, also a teetotaler (though, or perhaps because, born in a pub), also a socialist, and at least an agnostic if not an atheist. Plenty for any offspring to rebel against there. In 1905, Alec got a job teaching physics, chemistry, drawing, and botany at Marlborough Grammar School. He and Mildred lived in Marlborough for the rest of their lives. They had two sons, of whom the second, known then as Billy, was born in 1911. For whatever reason, Alec never became a headmaster, and middle-class competitive disdain (so well captured later by Golding in *The Pyramid*) may have been what made him come to regard himself as a professional and social failure.

The house in which Billy grew up, and Marlborough College, the great public (that is, private) school at the other end of the High Street—very much not, in the minutely calibrated British social scale, the grammar school where his father taught—each, in their different ways, influenced him till the end of his life.

No. 29 The Green was ancient: it certainly went back to the eighteenth century, and in part, Golding was convinced, as far as the fourteenth. Its dark cellars seemed haunted (he had recurrent nightmares about them), and its garden almost certainly had once formed part of the nearby church's burial grounds. The atmosphere of the place filled him with horror, augmented by the scarily persuasive ghost stories that his mother, a Cornish native, took pleasure in telling him. When he left home, he recalled, it was "like being let out of prison."

His animus against Marlborough College, though equally intense, was socially based. Both boys and masters there "radiated exclusiveness." The social gap between them and his family was "as real as a wound." From dreams he came to see that his ambition as a writer was bound up with a determination "to show Marlborough, and then piddle on them." As Carey says, "the sense of social inadequacy that dogged him all his life took root here." His late-in-life zealous (and successful) pursuit of a knighthood, which has elicited patronizing sneers from English reviewers, was still part of the business of "showing them," just as his drinking and his youthful sexual escapades were in large part a reaction against his teetotaling and physically undemonstrative parents. "We were not a touching family," he recalled. His mother never hugged him or held him; and to make up for this she would throw things at him (including a metal pot full of hot tea) when she lost her temper.

He told Carey of several early experiences that highlight that uncertain area between an ultra-vivid creative imagination and visions of an otherworldly reality. When less than two, in his crib, he claimed to have seen what looked like a small white cockerel strutting along the curtain-pole, head bobbing, emanating "utter friendliness." Then it vanished, and the friendliness went with it. A year or two later, in Savernake Forest (later to provide much of the landscape for *The Inheritors*) with his parents, he lagged behind, they hid for a joke, and alone in the growing dusk he suddenly saw a stag's head, with antlers, radiating "stillness and terrible indifference." His parents swore there had been no stag; he knew better, and knew too that this was not "an ordinary kind of seeing." Was there a difference between these visions and the vividly detailed waking dream he had when about ten—subsequently proved imaginary—of helping a museum curator unbandage a mummy? Impossible to tell, though he firmly believed so.

All his life the conflict between mystical experience and scientific evidence nagged at his psyche.

For the most part Golding's school days at Marlborough Grammar School were successful and unremarkable. His early taste in books, conveniently forgotten later, ran to Ian Hay and Edgar Wallace. He was good at games, captain of cricket, and an outstanding sprinter; he also won a prize for drawing. Nagged at by Alec, he settled down to Latin and biology. He developed a lifelong passion for chess. He had inherited the musical genes from both parents, and fancied himself (all flash and little practice) a pianist.

Two young women, Dora Spencer and Mollie Evans, seem to have left an indelible mark on him. Dora was a Catholic, the daughter of a sergeant-majorish local redneck. Golding first met her as a violinist in a musical group, pursued her awkwardly but with determination, and got what he wanted while she was still only fifteen. Though ashamed of the urge, she enjoyed being whipped (by a local games master), and forced Golding to acknowledge, reluctantly, his own latent streak of sadism. His encounter with Dora is presented, only minimally fictionalized, in *The Pyramid*, where she figures as the promiscuous but miserable Evie Babbacombe.

With Mollie Evans he had a very different relationship. Unlike Dora, she was shy, delicate, idealistic, and shared his passion for literature. They became engaged. Both families approved. Eventually Golding's persistence triumphed, and they slept together. Mollie proved nervously frigid: sex was not a success. But they remained a couple through Golding's years at Oxford and his eventual drift into teaching at Maidstone Grammar School in 1938: increasingly used to each other, yet always too poor (and perhaps too uncertain) to marry.

Then, just before the outbreak of war, Golding met Ann Brookfield, from a large, raucous, left-wing Welsh family: beautiful, rebellious, a mathematician and a county hockey player. She and Golding took one look at each other and ended up, very enjoyably, in bed. They summarily broke off their existing engagements, and on September 30, 1939, poor or not, had a registry office wedding. Golding, who had found his spouse for life, was nevertheless haunted till his dying day by guilt for his precipitate betrayal and abandonment of Mollie. Desperately hurt, Mollie never married, and possibly suffered mental collapse. Golding drew her as Mary in *Pincher Martin*,

and, unforgettably, as Beatrice Ifor in *Free Fall*. Another huge part of his creative world was now in place.

WORLD WAR II, Carey rightly says, "changed the lives of everyone who lived through it." This was certainly true of Golding. In 1940, he joined the Royal Navy. As a rating in the cruiser *Galatea* he saw action in the pursuit of the *Bismarck* (and on watch, embarrassingly, mistook the spouting of a whale for shell fire). Commissioned from the ranks, he served with distinction as the commander of a rocket ship on D-Day and during the Walcheren landings, an experience of death and destruction that he never forgot. As part of the first draft of an essay for *Holiday* magazine, "Through the Dutch Waterways," in an impressionistic memory of the battle excised from the final text, he recalled "ships mined, ships blowing up into a Christmas tree of exploding ammunition, ships burning, sinking—and smoke everywhere slashed by sudden spats of tracer over the shell fountains and the broken, drowning men." One valuable lesson he learned from all this, as he candidly admitted, was that he found he could think clearly and act courageously even when terrified.

But the war in fact had a far more deep-seated effect on him. Carey was given access to a private memoir titled "Men, Women & Now," never printed or even typed, written in 1965 at Ann's suggestion as a piece of self-analysis and an answer to critics who claimed that Golding could not write about relations between men and women or "deal with adults deeply." In this memoir Golding put it on record that the war triggered "a sort of religious convulsion which is not uncommon among people of a passionate and morbid habit," that it gave him for the first time "a kind of framework of principles which I still hold mainly, even when I am untrue to them," and that it made him see—also, one

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suspects, for the first time—what he describes as the “viciousness” and “cruelty” of his own youth.

He thought himself a monster; he looked into his heart and saw universal evil there. In a much-quoted phrase, he declared that “I have always understood the Nazis because I am of that sort by nature,” and added that *Lord of the Flies* was generated, at least in part, by “that sad self-knowledge.” Golding’s surrogate Christopher in *Pincher Martin*, actor and layabout, is famously described by an acquaintance: “This painted bastard here takes anything he can lay his hands on.... He was born with his mouth and his flies open and both hands out to grab. He’s a cosmic case of the bugger who gets his penny and someone else’s bun.” How far was any of this true? It all sounds like a case of what a Catholic priest with long experience of the confessional once described to me as “self-flattering sinfulness.” The evidence from his actual life that Carey has so painstakingly pieced together strongly suggests that both here and in his memoir Golding decidedly exaggerates his record (if not his dreams) of wrongdoing: he comes across as not really much worse than the average self-centered adolescent.

But he did—as Dora Spencer perceived and I well recall—have a streak of cruelty about him when dealing with the weak and vulnerable: these, women in particular, he often wanted (as he himself admitted) not only to dominate but also to break down. He was, in fact, a classic tail-twister, something those as tough as him tended not to notice. Both his children, at one time and another, suffered nervous collapses. This is unlikely to have been coincidental. Thus he faced the postwar world saddled not only with horrific war memories, but also with a crushing (if exaggerated) burden of guilt at what he took to be his own ineradicably cruel, vicious, and generally evil nature. Despite the limited factual basis for such a severe judgment, the belief itself was to permeate his attitude to life and everything he wrote.

In 1945, Golding returned to the teaching post at Bishop Wordsworth’s School in Salisbury Grammar School that he had briefly occupied in 1940—after being sacked from Maidstone Grammar School for what he described, ambiguously, as “an unacademic combination of drink, women and politics.” His politics, like Ann’s, were radical, his relations with women could be dangerous, and his drinking had started early, though this is the first recorded occasion—but by no means the last—on which it

had embarrassing consequences. He clearly stepped up his intake in order to cope both with his wartime memories and his nagging sense of guilty self-hatred. He also claims that he disliked teaching (though some of his pupils remembered him with real affection and admiration). What he wanted to be was a writer, but with a wife and a growing family he needed a job, and he was unqualified for anything else. This was the life he led for the next sixteen years, until *Lord of the Flies* finally came to his rescue.

It was not that Golding wrote nothing before then. He produced at least three unsuccessful novels, scribbled during breaks, lunch hours, or even in class when his pupils were answering quizzes or writing essays. Two of these were adventure stories centered on small-boat sailing, one of them described by its author as “Arthur Ransome for grownups.” The third, predictably, was a school novel, *Short Measure*, set in a thinly disguised Bishop Wordsworth’s, about which Carey tells us just enough to whet our curiosity (that is, it contained a fictionalized version of what life might have been like had Golding married Mollie, and an account of the repressed pederastic devotion, cast in religious terms, of one master to a beautiful blond blue-eyed schoolboy). All three submissions were turned down by publishers, though *Short Measure* made Jonathan Cape ask to see more of Golding’s work. And then, one winter evening in 1951, after the children had been read to in bed from R. M. Ballantyne’s *The Coral Island*, Golding had a brainwave. “Wouldn’t it be a good idea,” he mused to Ann, “if I wrote a book about children on an island, children who behave in the way children really would behave?”

I FIRST MET Bill Golding when Tony Godwin picked both of us for the selection committee of the Book Society in 1959; but for several years before that we had carried on an illuminating correspondence about his work. He came across as witty, ironical, surprisingly pragmatic, and more than willing to discuss his creative ideas with a complete stranger. These letters laid the foundations for what was to prove perhaps the closest, and certainly the most enduring, friendship of my life. They also furnished me with essential material for an evaluation of the first four novels, *Lord of the Flies*, *The Inheritors*, *Pincher Martin*, and *Free Fall*, delivered as a lecture to the Royal Society of Literature in 1960, and published in the Society’s annual three years later. The conclusions

I reached then I still, for the most part, maintain today. Each of these novels has an isolated setting—a small uninhabited island, a prehistoric wilderness, a lonely Atlantic rock, a prison cell—used, like a petri dish, for experiment without external influence. Equally important, the characters of the first two—young schoolboys, inarticulate Neanderthals—preclude the study of full adult relationships. It is only with the first-person narratives of *Pincher Martin* and *Free Fall* that we see the beginnings of a fierce struggle to break loose from this self-imposed isolation.

Golding revealed, in his work and in his letters to me, a passion for the crucial importance of individual self-knowledge, which he saw as the only hope for modern humanity. All his characters, he insisted to Ann, must have some kind of cosmic connection with the universe, and through the universe (as he made clear) to a less-than-clearly-conceived notion of God. I began to see him as a kind of spiritual cosmologist: from the start he seems to have been battling his father’s world of scientific reason. Both *Lord of the Flies* and *The Inheritors* took a popular modern notion—the happy upper-class colonialism of Ballantyne’s *The Coral Island*, the evolutionary rationalism of H. G. Wells’s *The Grisly Folk*—and stood it on its head. In both we are brought face-to-face with the loss of primal innocence, and in *The Inheritors* we glimpse an unfamiliar version of the Fall, with a Neanderthal couple as the prelapsarian Adam and Eve.

Pincher Martin, using both Aeschylus and Dante, shows us a recalcitrant dead man creating his own Promethean purgatory: his final cry, impenitent and defiant as the black lightning plays around him, is “I shit on your heaven!” Sammy Mountjoy, the narrator of *Free Fall*, who shows himself capable of the kind of heightened mystical vision shared by creators as different as Traherne and van Gogh, cries for help and does win through in the end to a perception of the truth; but the truth for Golding was still that all terror and despair are born of the human mind, and all evil too, while Sammy remains hopelessly crippled (Golding once told me) by the scientific rationalism of his “confused cosmos.” We are back with original sin. Wasn’t good equally an exclusively human concept? “Good can take care of itself,” he replied. “Evil is the problem.” Carey’s biography lets us see how closely he based this belief on his own early life.

So—like Monteith, like Carey—I was more than a little surprised by Bill Golding

in the flesh: cheerful, solid, well-spoken, quick-witted, twinkly-eyed, blond and bearded, excellent company, with no sign of the tortured soul so apparent in his fiction, and no obvious evidence of any upward social anguish. We hit it off from the start, and after our panel meetings had a series of long enjoyable lunches at which we discussed everything from Euripides (his favorite ancient writer) to current British politics, but somehow said nothing about original sin. That, along with evil, had been dealt with in our correspondence. Face-to-face, British reticence took over. Literary critics who insisted on separating person from authorial persona ought to have been pleased. In fact, on learning that Bill was excellent, and at times uproarious, company, they tended to be either incredulous or irritated.

THE TURNING POINT in our relationship was brought about by my emigration in the spring of 1963, with my family, to a small Greek island village, from which we cheerfully invited the Goldings to come visit. They did: a habit that persisted over the years, and at all seasons. Most of my best memories of Bill have a Mediterranean background. There were walls of English reticence on both sides that perhaps only the relentless clarity of the Aegean, together with the suspension of those equally relentless social pressures against which we both kept up a kind of *odi et amo* running battle, could have combined to bring down. I vividly recall Bill's unofficial midday taverna discussions, over beer and meze, with a fascinated circle of expats, all of whom he coaxed into being wonderfully articulate and confrontational: he must have been a far more inspiring teacher than Carey's sources were prepared to admit.

I also remember one March when we drove to Delphi in a snowstorm (which made the place look like an eighteenth-century steel engraving) and Bill and I engaged in a riveting over-the-retsina argument about the nature of the Pythia's utterances. A quarter of a century later his extraordinary posthumous novel, *The Double Tongue*, showed how deeply the discussion had lodged itself in his creative psyche. The mystical element in that psyche responded strongly to the Hellenic atmosphere. But how to express the mystical vision that is beyond words? How to defy ineffability? *Free Fall* had been moving in that direction. *The Spire*—published in 1964: I remember Bill correcting proofs in our Greek island house—faced the challenge head-on.

Once again, the inspiration was local. Salisbury Cathedral boasts the tallest surviving pre-fifteenth-century spire in the world: 404 feet high, miraculously un-fallen (aided by buttresses, bracing arches, and iron ties) above a building with only four feet or so of poor brushwood and rubble foundations, so that when some 6,500 tons of extra weight were put on them, the massive corner pillars reportedly “sang,” and to this day can still be seen bending inward under the unimaginable stress. From his classroom Bill could see repairs to the spire going on; he knew the story well. *The Spire* does not name the cathedral, but the spire's making in the novel, described with striking technical expertise and relish, is true in every detail. What we have here is a historical fable of immense subtlety and ambition, confronting a priest striving upward for the greater glory of God (and believing in miracles) with a pragmatic master builder who calculates stress empirically by weight and knows, to a yard or two, when the spire will—inevitably, as he believes—collapse.

That against all the odds it did not do so, that it still stands today, is a truth outside the fiction. We know it, in a way that the fictional characters, mired in the interplay of saintliness and human brutishness, cannot. What *The Spire* shows, in detail, is the welter of lust, hatred, even murder that is inextricably bound up with Dean Jocelin's transcendent vision and Roger Mason's heroic stonework. But the dying Jocelin can still only catch a fleeting glimpse of his vision, and all he can find to describe it is the sunlit glory of an apple tree, the flash of a vanishing kingfisher. Throughout his career Golding pursued the manifestation of that vision, and to the very end it remained elusive. Evil, by comparison, was easily depictable.

With assured success, too, the tight and painful creative knot of guilt and mysticism began to loosen. *Darkness Visible* (which appeared in 1979, after a long decade of desperate re-writing and revision) was the last of the great cosmic novels, and it is significant that it was the book that Golding always flatly refused to discuss, largely because (as he privately admitted) he had not the faintest idea what it was really about. The hell this time was burning London (and could have been Dresden, or Hiroshima), with Matty a new Simon refined and purged in the flames; but this near-supernatural element never quite melds with the second theme of the twins Toni and Sophy,

nascent terrorist and nasty psychological basket case, both very much of this world, guilt and all. Once more the conclusion is left open-ended, but this time, I suspect, not for metaphysical reasons, but because Golding could not find a way to tie it up convincingly.

Matty, in fact, represents Golding's farewell to the quasi-mystical protagonist and cosmic—but vivid and immediate—

world that were the disconcerting moral inventions of his early novels, and which so amply justified the award to him in 1983 of the Nobel Prize in Literature. With *Rites of Passage* and its two successors in the trilogy *To the Ends of the Earth*, his fiction enters

the traditional mainstream: no accident that it was *Rites of Passage* that won him the Booker Prize. It is only with *The Double Tongue*, that uncanny and unfinished investigation of the nature of creative utterance, pitting (literally) divine inspiration against rational intelligence, that we sense an exciting return to the old questing originality. Golding's Euripidean anti-clericalism helped him to draw a marvelous portrait of the rational, cynical, well-read, and carefully profit-conscious Delphic high priest Ionides. This charming ironist finds himself landed with a new Pythia, called Arieka, who may—disconcertingly, because he does not really believe in it—be the real thing, Apollo's true mouthpiece. She, reminiscing in her eighties (like Golding when he created her), recalls a devastating, mindless possession and rape of her by the god during her first mantic session as a young girl, amid mad laughter, her mouth torn and bloody. “One mouth or the other!” the voice cries in her head. But which one?

That puzzle, as always with Golding, remains unsolved. Had he lived longer, would he have come nearer to the answer? Is there a *vox Dei* beyond the reach of scientific explanation? Are the two (as Golding, through Arieka, sometimes seems to hint) irremediably confused? We cannot tell. So let Arieka herself have the last word. The final event she records in her memoir (supposedly written late in the first century B.C.E.) is the offer of a statue by the Athenians to honor her long career as Pythia. What they should rather do, she suggests, is erect a simple altar with a dedicatory inscription: “To the Unknown God.” I can almost hear Bill's sly chuckle as he wrote those closing words. Not everyone has the privilege of giving themselves so appropriate, and so ambiguous, an exit line. ♦



Washington Diarist

In the Know

IN WINESBURG, OHIO, George Willard, “the Ohio village boy,” suddenly “crosses the line into manhood” when he is pierced by a sense of his own finitude. “The sadness of sophistication has come to the boy. With a little gasp he sees himself as merely a leaf blown by the wind through the streets of his village. He knows that in spite of all the stout talk of his fellows he must live and die in uncertainty, a thing blown by the winds, a thing destined like corn to wilt in the sun.” Sherwood Anderson’s understanding of sophistication was nothing like our own. Like many habitudes in the past hundred years, this one has grown complicated and thin. Our sophistication bears no resemblance to wisdom and no sadness attaches to it. Our sophistication is merely a skill for many surfaces. It is anything but a consciousness of ultimate questions; it is, in fact, a flight from such a consciousness. Its objective is breadth, not depth. It is the talent for speaking confidently on subjects about which one knows very little, on subjects about which one has only heard—a social skill, an exhibition of virtuosity to others—the intellectual aspiration of a dinner guest. Above all, it is a way of avoiding embarrassment. There are people for whom nothing is more embarrassing than to be caught not in the know. To arm themselves against embarrassment, they choose knowingness, which is just ignorance hidden by information. (The electronic media are the supreme instruments of knowingness, of second-hand knowledge. The stench of Google is everywhere.) Of course there is a philosophical problem here: none of us can rely upon observation and experience and study for the entirety of our beliefs. Our lives are more restricted than our interests. We must depend on the reports of others who have covered the wars and witnessed the performances that we ardently discuss. With the past, certainly, there is no direct acquaintance; and very few of us can test the validity of what we assert as true about the natural world. So we turn to

authorities, or to pseudo-authorities. And having satisfied ourselves that we have met the current requirements of well-roundedness, that we have gained the competence for the finest and most advanced platitudes, we enter the lists. We exchange, and congratulate ourselves on, the right signs and references. We teach ourselves to become even a little haughty about what we discovered the day before yesterday. (“What, you haven’t seen Osipova?”) And the victims of our intimidation go home to bone up in private, to remediate their out-of-the-loopness and prepare themselves for a role in the *on dit*—except of course the strong ones among them, who recognize this game for what it is, and prefer something better than sophistication, more specific and more substantive, a parcel of knowledge strenuously acquired and genuinely possessed. Sometimes they, the post-sophisticates, run the risk of being without an opinion, which is of course heroic.

MY OWN SINS are what I am describing. I am not immune to the vanity of range, to the social effects of high-level facility. But the other day I learned that there is hope for me. A letter arrived from a friend in Jerusalem. He is a poet and a scholar, and the most perfect aesthete I have ever known. His apartment in Agnon’s old neighborhood is one of beauty’s best addresses: paintings, drawings, prints, and collages luxuriantly cover the walls, except the looming wall of books, which includes a great library of Jewish works, and in this humble corner of Hebrew Levantinism even the old rabbinical editions seem verdant and voluptuous: Rashi by Bonnard. The fruit and the fish and the wine are always hedonistically vivid. The plantings on the terrace are tropically dense, and the little jungle almost obscures the old lectern, sprung from a synagogue, on which my friend rests his texts. The blessed place is a kind of refuge for forms and flavors. It lifts me up every time. As do my friend’s letters, which are reports on his readings and his

tastings; and his recent letter was no different. A comic account of an attempt to arrange a trip to Provence with another poet is followed by a wicked memory of Leonard Bernstein’s appetitiveness in Jerusalem, and then this: “Now I am back to Scève, his *Délie* perhaps my ultimate-favorite book of poems.” That is what stopped me. *Délie*, his favorite poems? But I do not know *Délie*! I have not even heard of it, or of its maker. I experienced a moment of shame. (“What, you haven’t read Scève?”) But then shame gave way to exhilaration, because my horizon had been pushed back, and thereby saved from the assurance that it is wide enough, which is a mark of decadence. Now I was filled with an almost childlike joy that there is more, that there is always more; that the richness is beyond measure. I am still a capacity. Ignorance, I reflected, is a kind of readiness, a kind of youth. Should those who already know Scève envy me the excitement of our first meeting? Shall I console them for the fading of early love and the strain of restoring it? Is there any beauty more beautiful than the beauty I do not yet know?

I TRUST MY FRIEND’S judgment—more, I cherish it; he has brought me so many tidings over the years—“for out of Zion ...”; and I now have *Délie*, or selections from it, in the original with the emblems that accompanied the poems, wonderfully translated and introduced by Richard Sieburth. Maurice Scève was a prominent humanist in Lyons in the sixteenth century. He published *Délie*, *objet de plus haute vertu*, or *Délie*, *Object of Highest Virtue*, in 1544. It is a sequence of 450 love poems, the first French *canzoniere* in the style of Petrarch, and also—this is Sieburth—“the first book of the Renaissance fully to integrate poems and emblems.” Sometime around 1536, Scève fell crushingly in love with Pernette du Guillet, a blond, blue-eyed, and married young poet in Lyons, and his book is the record of his exquisite torments. “Like Mallarmé,” Sieburth nicely observes, “Scève is a poet of meanings and morphemes endlessly pleated and unpleated.” That is a little cold: these masterfully filigreed lyrics are also aching effusions of a desperate heart. But I will say no more. I have only just learned this much. The book is by my bed. I will live with it and see. The condition of knowledge—unlike information, unlike sophistication—is time, which is of course what we, the latest and the smartest, have set out to abolish.

LEON WIESELTIER



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